

Crypto-Retro-Marxist Faux Documentation

by

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A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate
Faculty of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

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Troy, New York

February 28, 2008
(For Graduation May 2008)

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I want to thank all of my collaborators who have helped to make the movies much more amazing than I could have ever done alone as well as programmers and writers who have supported the films. Additionally I would like to thank Cat Mazza, Dean DeMatteis, Igor Vamos, Jung Yoon Lee, Kathy High, Rich Pell, Abina Manning, Andrea Grover, Ed Halter, Branda Miller and my parents Kathy and Reed Finn for their support. And of course the endo- and ectothermic creatures who have helped advance my career: Freddy, Leroi, Francoise, Chumchum, Junior, Martin, Ocho, Slobodan, Willie McGee and George Hendricks.

ABSTRACT

The three long-form films I have made in the last three years use humor, irony, fictional historical re-creation and poetic devices to examine the role of the political Left in history. My experimental narrative films borrow generously from traditional genres like musicals, sci-fi films and propaganda documentaries while avoiding traditional narrative techniques such as following a character arc, dramatic plot points. Part socialist-realist documentary, part training film, part poetry workshop—I am interested in creating a singular experience. These structural and language experiments in film help to create a fictional alternative to our present-day narrative reality dictated so efficiently to us by the corporate media and “independent” film/video work that is often just fighting for a seat at the conglomerate’s table. By making work that refuses to fit neatly into a market-driven category, my films mirror the radical ideology of their protagonists and create authentic, truthful experiences even when they deviate from historical fact.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ed Halter in the Village Voice called *La Trinchera Luminosa del Presidente Gonzalo* a “crypto-retro-Marxist faux documentation” which could really be said about all three of my feature-length films: *Interkosmos* (2006), *La Trinchera Luminosa del Presidente Gonzalo* (2007) and *The Juche Idea* (2008). Each film has a unique structure and deals with communist ideology and revolutionary art in an experimental and at times humorous way. The primary formal reference for each of the films in this communist trilogy is socialist realism, but they all borrow generously from musicals, science fiction, and propaganda (among others) to become experimental narratives. My films are made in part as a postmodern development of socialist realism. Instead of throwing out the genre along with the communist governments, socialist realism developed and absorbed bits of other genres and the detritus of capitalist media and culture to create pseudo-historical left-wing films.

Below is an excerpt from *Soviet Textiles*, which gives an indication a larger argument between socialist realism and other radical structural experimentation:

Between 1928 and 1933, the debate over an appropriately Soviet textile design took place... the well-respected art historian and administrator Aleksei Fedorov-Davydov wrote that fabrics were “ideological goods” that could reach the farthest corners of the Soviet Union and therefore could have enormous impact. However, in a 1931 speech reprinted in the trade journal *Textiles’ Voice*, Davide Arkin, a scholar from the Academy of Artistic Sciences in Moscow, protested the use of thematic design on textiles, suggesting that they would lose their impact after a short time. The artist Lya Raiser took an extreme position, contending that all decorative ornament was bourgeois and therefore none belonged in Soviet textile design... Although there was considerable dissent on the issue of thematic textile design, ultimately those artists who supported thematic motifs prevailed. They had maneuvered themselves into a position of authority in the textile world by attaching themselves to the influential realist art group the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia. (*Kachurin*, 25)

This excerpt gives a good illustration as to how the “realist” model for arts and crafts won out in the Stalinist period. Socialist realism, an art movement that glorified the wonders of socialist society and idealized worker and peasant life often at the expense of historical fact, was the official art model adopted during the Stalin years and

it continued to influence revolutionary communist art well after Stalin's death. The films in my communist trilogy each makes reference to this basic model of socialist realist art: in *Interkosmos* with its hammer and sickle torch parade, in *Trinchera* with its Cultural Revolution murals, and in *The Juche Idea* in the basic plot of the sci-fi film—the heroine selflessly resisting the imperialist slaughter of innocents to bring back criminal evidence to North Korea. But each film borrows generously from musicals, science fiction, and propaganda as well as mixing fact and fiction.



Figure 1.1 *Interkosmos* still: Field hockey uniforms based on a Soviet sports uniform design from the 1920s.

Interkosmos is structured roughly along the lines of a Golden Age Hollywood musical and looks like a seventies realist documentary. The story is about a utopian East German program called “wundertüte” in the seventies which was an artistic mission to colonize the moons of Saturn and Jupiter, complete with Marxist factories on Titan and a “people’s carnival colony” on Ganymede. The cosmonauts read their dreams to each other, needlepointed and watched experimental films as a way of stretching and exercising their brains in the doldrums of long-term space travel. The idea of a reformist artistic utopian program springing up within the post-Stalinist paranoid Eastern bloc references not only historical movements like Prague Spring in 1968 but also gets back to the energy and idealism of the pre-Stalinist Marxist Left. There are overt references in the film, in the title sequences and the field hockey uniforms to early Soviet textile

design (Fig. 1.1). Designers at this time were pushing the boundaries of their craft and arguing over such things as whether socialist realist textile design was really a hidden bourgeois art form (Kachurin, 25). This is the energy I wanted to recreate with *Interkosmos*. The fictional artist/editor in this film is someone who was allowed to go into the East German archives to make a film about this program. Perhaps the film was made in the mid 1980s and ignored or in the early 1990s and overlooked.

La Trinchera Luminosa del Presidente Gonzalo is structured as a day in the life video document of the Maoist prisoners. It is the closest of the films to pure propaganda. There is very little to suggest that the film is anything other than a long infomercial for the Shining Path. The subtle giveaways include the *Lord of the Flies*-like attacks, especially by the young girls, during the Criticism scene, the cult-like repetition of slogans throughout the film, the eyeless portrait of Chairman Gonzalo during the Criticism scene, and the absurd bedtime prayer: “Chairman Gonzalo is the eye/ The party is the socket/ And the people are the skull”. The film’s structure was dictated by what the Shining Path would allow. They would allow a politically sympathetic documentary crew or maybe the prisoners themselves filmed the footage, which is why the group comes off in a mostly positive light. The final product, however, was not what they anticipated. So, in a sense, I built the film to look as if it were a failed propaganda film.

The Juche Idea is made up of the propaganda and video art of the artist, Yoon Jung Lee as well as her interviews with a Bulgarian filmmaker. The story is told within the interview parts but we actually see how the artist interprets *Juche* cinema in her videoart and films. We have an artist who had some modest success with her political videos. Instead of cashing in on that success as a gallery artist or as a festival filmmaker, she goes off to live in the hermit kingdom of North Korea and make communistic videoart in a secretive art residency. Again, the propaganda elements are filled with the typical Marxist images of parades and power and workers happily working, but with absurd parts like comparing the North Korean people to a cud-chewing “ruminant”, a simile that would never make it past the censors. But this film, which on the surface is making fun of communist kitsch, is working on another level as well—the role of an artist working within a system and trying to fit her ideas into the larger structure of the art market, in this case *Juche* cinema.

The idea of a failed propaganda film in Peru like the failed mission in *Interkosmos* and the failed society in North Korea are all references to the failures or perception of failures of the revolutionary Left—even victory is a failure when the outcome are concentration camps and bureaucratic state control. Failure, death, disappearance and historical revisionism have become such a part of our understanding of the Left that the myth of the pure revolutionary who died young (Edith Lagos for the Shining Path; Chef Guevara for Cuba; Carlos Fonseca for Nicaragua; Malcolm X for the US) serve as ideological hagiography for the secular left. But what to do about the actual ideology and the role of ideology in the art-making process? And how do the rules of fact and fiction and genre play into our understanding of the world? And how do those rules shape our ideology?

These three films, which look at communist ideology and capitalism from the perspective of a communist, also remind us of our ideological limitations in our art. In what Louis Aragon called the “dictatorship of Capital” (*Pachnicke*, 193), what are the rules artists live by? By making the films about socialist countries and using humor and easily recognizable genre tropes, the films seem to be working on one level as kitschy mockumentaries. But the laughter at this other absurd ideology may just be turned back at the viewer. I am working in the tradition of what Martin Scorsese calls the director as smuggler—bringing in unpopular or forgotten ideas in the guise of narrative. One of the most famous smuggler directors is Douglas Sirk, who made melodramas that were searing indictments of the empty consumer culture and hypocrisy of post-war US. Warner Bros. film noirs often had brutal social messages about the inequities in our society. In my films, there are clear critiques of capitalism which are safely hidden away in dismissed ideologies and cult-like behavior. Criticizing capitalism in our culture is like criticizing the air. It only makes sense to criticize elements or extremes of capitalism not the system itself. What has been lost with the demise of state socialism is this national critique of capitalism as a monolithic political-economic structure that forms humans into competition engines. Even when this critique came from a compromised source like a hypocritical Eastern bloc “worker’s paradise” it still stung.

Now that we live in a post-communist bloc world and heading back to a nineteenth-century model of free-market capitalism, what is the role of the revolutionary

artist? My films are about uncompromising revolutionaries. Cosmonaut Seagull in *Interkosmos*, Laura in *Trinchera* and Yoon Jung in *The Juche Idea* believe themselves to be part of this wave of history that bring them ultimately into the shore safely. Their ideas, which seem at times fanatical, stubborn, misguided or even confused, are held onto in the way artists hold on to ideas and push ahead with them despite misgivings and repeated failures. In this way, the characters as well as the unseen editors and filmmakers all share in the radical artistic vision. They all believe themselves to be on the side of history in spite of the historians and experts who tell them differently.

Each of the protagonists in the film is shaped and mirrored by an unseen artist/editor who puts the films together with radical structural and language experimentation. The forms of the films, though different share many similarities: the blending of fact and fiction, theory and action, poetry, ritual movement and political musical jams among others. Though each film has its own unique structure, they have enough in common to be put together into their own form—a pseudo-socialist poetic quasi-realist cinema.

1.1 BACKGROUND

My background as an artist originally was in poetry writing, literature and political science. After graduating with a degree in Creative Writing, I lived and worked with Guatemalan refugees for two years in Chiapas, Mexico. As a human rights accompanier with a nongovernmental organization called Witness for Peace, I traveled all over Southern Mexico and Guatemala working with Guatemalan community organizers, peasant farmers and health workers. The refugees were the civilian base of the nearly defeated Marxist insurgency in Guatemala. Many of the groups we worked with were politically aligned with one of the various “lines” of Marxist ideology and so we had to always balance our meeting and visits with representatives from all the various lines so that we would not be perceived as being aligned with any one line, giving me—a first-hand education in the Byzantine complications of the Latin American Left. At the same time, the Zapatista uprising occurred and I witnessed the massive militarization of Chiapas and the increasing control mechanisms of the state. I bought a still camera and began to document the refugee camps and the lives of the people I stayed and traveled with. I became a kind of mobile photo service, making multiple copies of the black-and-

white photos and bringing them to different camps and then crossing the border back to Guatemala along with letters from family members who had not seen each other for over a decade. Not long after returning to the U.S., my interests in writing and photography developed into making 16mm films and videos.

In 1995 I moved to Chicago and started working as an actor/writer/production assistant on a number of experimental, underground and student film productions. I made my first 16mm films, *Sharambaba* and *Granada*, from 1997-1999. *Granada* was a dance fantasy number that was visually stunning but conceptually lacking. Although I shot *Sharambaba* first, I was not happy with the dialogue and the whole film had a student film vibe to it. But when I reversed the footage on the analog Steenbeck editing system, it made me laugh. On the faded yellowish tiny editing screen, it had the look and sound of an obscure, ignored foreign film. I realized that the dialogue lines I wrote such as, “Marriage is like a ghetto/ They live in a home that/ no one wants to see/ Yet they love it and yet/ they want to burn it down.” The line in English seemed campy or jokey, but in the context of a story set in a former Soviet republic and quoting a communist grandmother’s saying, it made sense. And it added this bit of pathos of what we have lost by relegating an entire ideology (communism) to the historical scrap heap. This was the first time that I used the idea of an unseen artist/editor who created this “found footage” that I was presenting. I used a similar strategy in my films *el güero* (2001), *comunista!* (2001) and *wüstenspringmaus* (2002) before the three long-form films that I made between 2005-8).

1.2 WRITING AND LANGUAGE

I have made films in English; but in the three long-form films I wanted to get at the core of Marxist ideology and our understanding of it. There are certain elements in all of the films—the charm of old communism—that are present mainly in the marching scenes in the three movies though the trope of the radical heroine could also be a kind of movie Marxist cliché. I do not run away from this imagery since the communist states themselves created this theatrical agit-prop as a way of reminding the masses how amazing their system was, especially when the countries were concerned about their own legitimacy (K. Clark, xii). This mass demonstration of power and culture was an im-

portant element in the socialist states. In *Trinchera Luminosa* I used the actual Shining Path song lyrics for the march, while in *Interkosmos*, I wrote the marching lyrics including lines like “crack the womb of despair.” That line would never make it past the censor. More than simply making fun of communist kitsch, I am trying to create an alternative socialist poetics that never really was allowed to flourish with the bureaucratic controls of the states or movements. All three films have parts where a character reads poetry, but the poetic similes and devices are used throughout the films to create an alternative use of language. By working outside English, I can use subtitles to my advantage. Subtitling allows me to present written phrases on the screen as verse couplets and use poetic devices like enjambment—when the line break alters the syntax of the phrase—so important in poetry for creating allusion and metaphor by disrupting literal sense. In these socialist societies, the language itself has been remolded into a new poetic socialist language. This then becomes one part of the larger movement pseudo-socialist poetic quasi-realist cinema.

My background as an artist originally was in poetry writing, literature and political science. I was especially influenced by the Chilean poet Nicanor Parra, who wrote what he called antipoetry. His writing mixes lyrical metaphors with a blunt and absurd quality that undermines the lyrical quality of traditional Latin American poetry. His satire, deceptively light tone, and political subtext has had a lasting effect on my own writing. I also wanted to work with languages besides English to try and offset the dominant Western perspective in the media and in the art world. In this I was influenced by writers like American poet Adrienne Rich who wrote in “The Burning of Paper Instead of Children” “... *There are flames of napalm in Catonsville, Maryland. I know it hurts to burn. The typewriter is overheated, my mouth is burning. I cannot touch you and this is the oppressor's language.*” Working in other languages allows me to switch perspectives from outside our own North American hypercapitalist vantage point by including the maker of the film as a character. Instead of an omniscient authority, the filmmaker/editor/camera person is exposed as a narrator shaping our understanding of the subject matter. The other benefit is that subtitling presents the written word on the screen as a verse couplet and lets me use enjambment—when the line break alters the syntax of

the phrase—so important in poetry to creating allusion and metaphor and disrupting literal sense.

The filmmaker as a character is also playing with idea of the unreliable narrator. In *Trinchera Luminosa*, it is never clear who made the film. What is the purpose of the film? Is it supposed to be a propaganda film or an anti-communist joke? And the narrator in *Interkosmos* has a voice of authority, even when he's describing events that are quite far-fetched. The humor in my work helps undercut the traditional authority of the documentary while the earnest language and factual detail undercut the comedy of my films. "Real seriousness," said Chilean antipoet Nicanor Parra, "rests in the comic." My films are developments in the tradition of political filmmaking, absorbing bits of other genres and the detritus of capitalist media and culture to create pseudo-historical left-wing films. Instead of Hollywood taking subjects and draining them of their political realities, my films are low-budget versions of Hollywood films that radicalize genres like the musical or sci-fi or love story. They examine both seriously and ironically not only capitalist and communist ideology but also the role of the artist in making revolutionary art.

1.3 FICTIONAL RE-CREATION AND EXPERIMENTAL STRUCTURE

Much of my work is a recreation of found material so I begin with an intensive research phase. For my first feature film *Interkosmos*, I looked at photographs and descriptions of training sessions and turned them into fictionalized reenactments of the cosmonaut program. The space capsule was developed from a photograph from the Soviet Soyuz space capsule and portions of dialogue were based on transcriptions of cosmonaut radio transmissions. In the case of *La Trinchera Luminosa del Presidente Gonzalo*, I began with a handful of interviews with Shining Path militants as well as a Latin American health promoter's guide. These I split up into various parts of the narrative and then build on to them, writing my own text or bringing in other sources, such as excerpts from Marxist leaders. I also added information from a U.S. counterinsurgency manual and even hand signals from a guide for college baseball. I have my own poetic metaphors and dialogue that goes in to bring the project together. For my two

feature-length projects I have collaborated with musicians. For *Trinchera Luminosa*, the music and art for the film were based loosely on songs and art that the guerillas produced. Everything (including the music) was made ahead of time so the actors could be surrounded by the language, literature, art and music of the Shining Path to help them portray the characters as authentically as possible while they were on the set. I have generally worked with non-actors for the performance elements in my films but *Trinchera Luminosa* was the first time I worked with a large group of trained actors. I collaborated with a local theater group called Working Classroom, an Albuquerque group for artists from historically marginalized communities. About half the cast was trained in performance. I found those with more experience helped the non-actors run lines and with the choreography, while the non-actors helped create a nontraditional atmosphere that helped the actors to be more natural.

In postproduction, I edit the scenes first as complete short films and then begin to piece them together. In the case of *Interkosmos* I organized the narrative along the lines of a Hollywood musical—basically a love story with a musical number every 8-10 minutes—even though the film is an experimental narrative. In *Trinchera Luminosa*, the film is basically the raw material of a documentary. Instead of seeing a ten-second clip of guerrillas studying with a voiceover explaining that they are studying, I filmed the entire scene so we see not only what they are learning but also how and why they are learning it. I built the film as a day in the life of a Maoist prison cellblock from dawn to late at night so the viewer could really experience the intensity of the group's indoctrination. By dropping the voiceover, I do not give the viewer the comfort of an omniscient narrator to explain what they are seeing. They are left to their own devices to figure out what this is and where they stand politically on the film.

To add to the realism of my films while also giving them the odd, found-footage quality, I include the maker of the film as an unseen background character. Instead of an omniscient authority, the filmmaker/editor/camera person is exposed as a narrator shaping our understanding of the subject matter and at the same time reminding us of the role of the media (and ideology) in shaping our understanding of events. Our knowledge of this character is gathered only through the film itself with no other identifying information. Many of my films are about the making of revolutionary art and agit-prop film.

The unseen filmmaker character can be someone working within the socialist realist model of a state-supported critique of capitalism as if the national communist film studios were never privatized. Or the filmmaker could be working in the tradition of Latin American social cinema, which made revolutionary films to counter the role of the media in promoting materialism and imperialism.

My intention is to radicalize the characters and the genre so that the characters, story, and structure become anti-capitalist, in the sense that the characters in the film would use the term because they see capitalism as a wrong path or as an organized pre-fascist society. An anti-capitalist structure, for example, is one that does not easily fit into a market slot, i.e., the women's film, sci-fi, Western, or even experimental. By structuring the films the way I do, I am radicalizing the film structure in the same way that a communist editor from one of my films would radicalize it. So in the case of *Trinchera Luminosa*, the film is edited as a fly on the wall-style documentaries of Frederick Wiseman, who made films that force the audience to make up their own minds by presenting the subjects without any explication or narration. *Interkosmos* and *The Juche Idea* are edited almost as a curated series of short films or short sections interconnected through narratives like dialogue. Breaking up traditional genres and the classification between fiction and nonfiction makes the viewer work to understand the piece instead of passively experiencing the piece. At the same time, the viewer becomes more aware of he or she is manipulated by the media classification into understanding the world as a market society.

1.4 WORKING WITH ACTORS AND NON-ACTORS

Apart from my first films *Granada* and *Sharambaba*, I performed in my own films with my animals or used found footage and did not work with other human performers. One of the reasons was the stress and anxiety of trying to put together a film shoot with all the time and money and energy spent for a non-commercial project. Those first two films were both expensive and each had months and even years-long setbacks that blunted any idea I had of making narrative films. I worked within an experimental structure both to challenge the idea of traditional filmmaking and the rules that have been passed down and implicitly about its form and also to bring the ideas I had from

writing poetry into films. I returned to the idea of making a long-form narrative film with *Interkosmos*. Out of necessity, I made a virtue of working with non-actors. One of the problems with actors is the theater issue—their training (and many are self selected for this) is to project this idea of a character through the lens of their personality out into a seated audience in a large physical space. But even actors who can control their reactions for the cameras are still understood by media-savvy audiences as acting though there is a kind of agreement between the audience and the actors. The actor agrees not to be too hammy or too subtle and there is a truce with the audience who suspend their disbelief so they can enjoy the flow of the narrative. But with experimental works, the audience does not know where they are heading or even necessarily trust the director so the actors come under even more scrutiny. My solution in *Interkosmos* was to use non-actors in the Robert Bresson or Clint Eastwood style—basically dress them up, give them the right music and sets and the right look and words so the audience can project their own ideas of the characters.

The challenge of working with non-actors is that they are usually not as reliable and often have no idea how time-consuming and difficult the work that they are doing for free is. Ambition helps. The hard work of making the film paid off with the quality, excitement and scope of the final project. Also the right ambience on set is important. Working with a great crew of people who you know and trust is one way to do that. I have acted in independent and experimental films and one of the horrors which I have seen many times is when the crew bands together with (though sometimes against) the director as the captain of their little ship. The actors are seen as invited special guests that everyone pretends to appreciate but who are secretly disdained because they're not really part of the club. I avoid that by working with small crews who are friends or by making the crew actors and the actors crew. In my case my art director was a character; the co-production designer and cameraman was the second lead actor and the lead actress Nandini Khaund helped organize the casting for the field hockey shoot.

For my next film *Trinchera Luminosa*, I knew it would be difficult to work with non-actors for all the scenes. Seven-minute monologues in Cultural Revolution Maoist jargon in Spanish would be hard for any working actor, much less an amateur. I had to cast that film and I worked with the New Mexico state film office and a local theater

group in Albuquerque called Working Classroom to advertise a casting call. I was nervous to work with the actors but the casting call helped weed out the theatrical ones and the ones who weren't serious. Again, working on the Bresson model of allowing the audience to project, I don't have a number of emotional scenes for the actors. The film is a quotidian video segment of a day in the life of this prison. The characters' emotions are guided, like everything, by the Party. We rehearsed the movements like the flag marching scene and did read-throughs of the lines for the other scenes. Since I was shooting video, I knew I was going to film the dress rehearsals as if they were the actual scenes. I was hoping to get the shots in one take to give a home-video look so there were many long frustrating hours of trying to get through the whole scene. This had the advantage of breaking down any pretense or self-consciousness and making it seem like a group of women trapped in a room, which along with the costumes, set design and period video made the film convincing. Since their characters had adopted these radical personas, the moments when the acting was transparent was forgiven as cult indication rather than the typical travails of low-budget filmmaking. Also, in this film as well as with the seventies-era film stock of *Interkosmos*, the low quality of the video worked to my advantage. Audiences doubt that a director would willingly make a film that looks so bad but with so much craft. That plays back to their expectations of a reality that was previously documented and that is now packaged for them to digest and understand.

With *The Juche Idea* I again went back to working with non-actors mainly because I was able to press-gang them into making a film over a number of months with little resources. With Oleg Mavromatti who plays the Russian tourist, I reciprocated by acting in his film. His style of directing was to constantly try to get more energy and emotion out of me in his film while my style of directing was to try to pull his energy down to make him seem more like a "normal" socialist tourist. With the other actors I used their own personalities and the Bresson/Eastwood projection to convince the audience that they were watching real interviews with artists in North Korea.

The foreign languages of all three films help with American and most world audiences. Anyone from Peru is going to know right away that the Mexican accents are not correct. Likewise, the German accent of Cosmonaut Seagull was not East German but Bavarian. In *The Juche Idea*, the accents are South instead of North Korean. This

punctures the myth of reality for the native speaker. But I can always fall back on the Ed Wood argument—it's more important to actually make the film in any way you can than to wait until you have the proper amount of money and resources to make the Film. Ultimately of course, these are fictional films. They are not objective documentations of reality. I am using the tropes of cinema vérité and docudrama and perhaps even reality TV to a certain degree to tell a fictional narrative involving this radical ideology. These strategies are necessary to make the film on my terms, i.e., outside the context of market domination or genre classification

1.5 INFLUENCES

1.5.1 TRADITIONAL NARRATIVE INFLUENCES

The radical protagonists in my films like *Cosmonaut Seagull*, *Comandante Laura* and Yung Joon can be seen communist variations of traditional women's genre film roles. In *Ninotchka*, for example, the title character played by Greta Garbo is an apologetic and witty Stalinist apparatchik who delivers lines like "there are fewer but better Russians" when pressed about the Moscow show trials. But in the end she gives up her Stalinist ideas for a French playboy, haute couture and love. With *Interkosmos* I reversed the trope so that the man has to give up his love for the woman's Stalinist ideals. The male protagonist Falcon sings to *Cosmonaut Seagull* a German version of the "Trolley Song" from *Meet Me in St. Louis*, a song about finding true love on public transportation. She calls it a capitalist love song, referring to capitalism as a "kindergarten of boneless children/ it looks good from the hallway,/ but when you get up close you can see how fleshy and rotten it is." Falcon's reaction is a bemused dismissal as if he's heard it before. But he is a loyal cosmonaut and keeps moving ahead into to set up this doomed utopian communities on the moons of the gas giants of Jupiter and Saturn. Besides getting some of the best laughs of the movie, it serves as an important plot point: the man has to choose to give up love to follow her on this politically radical mission to set up a galactic library of socialism.

Traditional maternal love in *Trinchera Luminosa* is briefly represented by *Comandante Laura* when she talks in her interview about her own children: "I was married. I want to see my children some day like any other mother. But what kind of life am I

providing them if I leave them a country that wants just to use them as grease-blood for their machinery. You might as well ask a guinea pig why it doesn't offer up more of its babies to the frying oil." Love in her case is taking over the state and tearing down the capitalist structures that create the societal inequities that the Shining Path is fight against. There is also a kind of evangelical love in the movie. The four swords of Marx, Lenin, Mao and Chairman Gonzalo are referred to in song, speech and art throughout the film. These men are the founding fathers of the movement and are secular saints to be studied and who serve as inspiration for the women. The love story in *The Juche Idea* takes place on one level between the protagonist Yoon Jung and Kim Jong Il in a meta-narrative in the scene of in the sci-fi movie within the film. In that scene my character, the genocidal American scientist is married to Yoon Jung. She is a North Korean agent or sympathizer who gives up personal life to infiltrate the fascist regime.

1.5.2 OTHER FILM AND ARTISTIC INFLUENCES

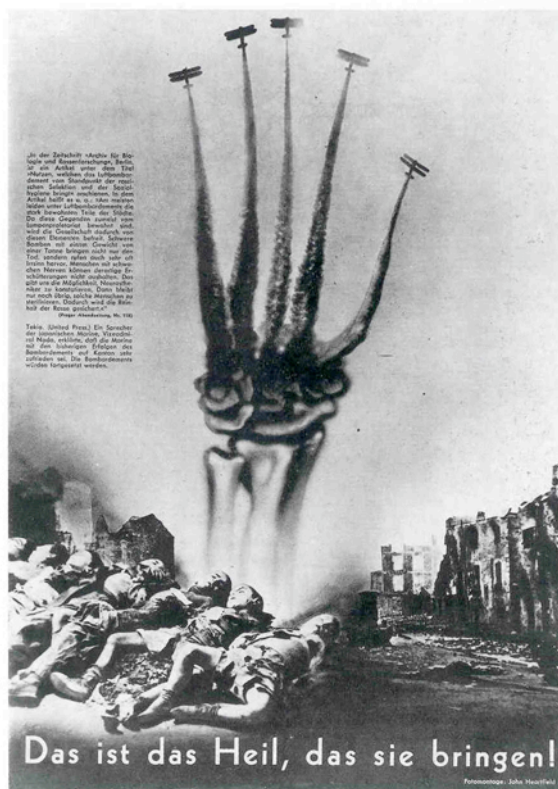
Rainer Werner Fassbinder's political melodramas and Luis Buñuel's Mexican films had a strong influence on my style and interests as a filmmaker. Fassbinder used the genre of a melodrama or women's film with an at times absurd sense of humor to expose the hypocrisy of the German economic miracle. Buñuel had to make a living in the Mexican studio system as a director in exile, so his surrealist ideas had to work within the context of that system. The tension of the traditional narrative techniques with a left-wing surrealism in his "minor" films like *Mexican Bus Ride*, *Susana* and his prematurely finished (he ran out of money) *Simon of the Desert* directly influenced my work. Both Fassbinder and Buñuel were able to make films about people crushed by the political and economic and cultural realities while still keeping at times quite a light touch and avoiding political didacticism through their deft handling of characters and humor. Guy Maddin was the filmmaker who unlocked this idea of an alternate history: of recreating a fictional history with obsolete technology or techniques. His film *Careful* used scale miniatures and had a look of hand-painted film, so the viewer was brought back to a film that looked like it was made in the 1930s but with themes like sexual repression that could never have been filmed at that time.

My first film, *Sharambaba*, was made as a found-footage film about a communist girl from a former Soviet republic resisting a capitalist suitor. I wanted this to look like a two-minute scene of a longer film that we don't know anything about. I followed this with a pair of short films *el güero* and *comunista!*, which were made so that the filmmaker or cameraperson became a character. In this way, the film became a kind of meta-narrative about the making of revolutionary art and agit-prop film. I wanted to create characters who ignored the collapse of communism and continued on with the same beliefs just as a Catholic would continue being Catholic even if suddenly surrounded by Protestants. One thing that was lost with the demise of the bureaucratic socialist dictatorships was some kind of alternative to capitalism and a state-supported criticism of the capitalist economic model. I wanted to be able to continue this model as if there were still a communist film studio being run—as if the inmates were now running the asylum. What if communist artists were now making socialist realist films but without the Stalinist or Brezhnevian apparatchiks enforcing the dogma? These films are made in part as a postmodern development of socialist realism.

This model I used when I made my short film *wüstenspringmaus*, a musical rear-projected history of the gerbil as a history of capitalism spreading like a rodent infestation across the globe. It uses a fuzzy animal, absurd humor and the earnestness of a 70s nature documentary to criticize an economic model (“New World capitalism”). I expanded this with my first feature film *Interkosmos*, about a failed East German space colonization mission to the moons of Jupiter and Saturn. That film is an alternative history of the D.D.R., where I present a utopian art colony in space trying to preserve the lost dream. *Interkosmos* is presented in the style of an essay film—influenced documentary. Instead of Hollywood taking subjects and draining them of their political realities, my films are in a sense low-budget Hollywood films that radicalize genres like the musical or sci-fi or even the prison film. What might have happened had Eugene Debs been elected our first socialist president in the 1920's. The Peruvian poet César Vallejo said, “Every true artist must be revolutionary, both politically and artistically, no matter what the moment or society in which he expresses himself.” (Hirschmann)

The radically political and Dadaist influenced photomontages by John Heartfield were also an important influence on my work. He reworked historical and news photos

of politicians, events to present a more accurate and incisive truth that could be had simply by looking at the photos of the day. Especially when news accounts were being manipulated and photos retouched and miscaptioned to give a false sense of reality. These issues in our open, democratic society are just as pressing today where instead of a state-controlled media, we have a media dominated by the need to sell products. The news serves as a product placement opportunity. Any news that makes the country look bad or implicates the citizens in a criminal adventure such as the war in Iraq is simply not going to air nationally. Instead, the media focus on minute policy differences or scapegoats. Even their criticism of the hugely unpopular Bush administration focuses on mistakes made rather than criminal intent and possible racketeering. They are worried about alienating Nixon's fabled "silent majority". Heartfield came out of the Dadaist movement and used absurd humor and seemingly incongruous images to get at a deeper truth. My work can be seen to come out of that tradition as well. I am using the language and imagery of the radical Left to criticize not only capitalist and imperialist systems but also to examine the Left's own history of authoritarianism and factionalism.



41. John Heartfield, *Questa è la salvezza che portano!*, 1938.

Figure 1.2 John Heartfield, 1938. "This is the salvation they bring!"

2. FILMS 1999-2005

My first film *Sharambaba*, I edited on a Steenbeck and found that I liked the film better backwards than forwards. So I shot it off the tiny screen and laid subtitles and had my first foreign found-footage film. The themes of my work are mostly love and the political Left. I followed that film up with one that I split into two different three-part shorts: *el güero* and *comunista!*. The idea was a homemade found-footage karaoke film about love and communism and the feeling of political despair. *wüstenspringmaus* came from an article I read about the Mongolian invasion of Europe, which was cut short by the death of the Great Khan. That invasion happened at the same time capitalism was forming in Holland. Once I found out the gerbil was originally from Mongolia, it all came together. *Decision 80* came from my long-standing obsession with the 1980 election, which was one of the really disastrous turns of American politics. Setting up Jimmy Carter as an Old Testament prophet and the Reaganites as an alien invasion made perfect sense. In *super-max* I again combined my sci-fi interests with politics by bringing in audio from the movie *Dune* and from the building of the Gateway Arch in my hometown of St. Louis. I thought of how the largest public works projects now are basically prisons, so I drove all over the US for months from Baltimore to Nevada and filmed these so-called super maximum security prisons from the outside. This was six months after 9/11 and I was very paranoid that I'd be arrested or harassed but apparently all the prison surveillance was all looking inward. With all the talk of terrorism, I didn't want to forget the massive population of humans that was already incarcerated in the US.

Sharambaba (3 min, 1999)

A young communist girl named Sharambaba resists her capitalist suitor in a carriage.

el güero (3 min, 2001)

"A refreshing look at karaoke, psychedelic dance moves, and donuts all mashed together into a small and swinging film about a man who considers his private thoughts and private jokes worth sharing with a large audience. And it's unlikely that many would disagree." —*Impakt Festival*

comunista! (3:30 min, 2001)

"You are invited to Jim's party! Snake optional." —*Cinematexas Festival*

wüstenspringmaus (3 min, 16mm film on video, 2003)

“‘The gerbil has long been associated with New World capitalism because of its incessant energy.’ The Golden Age of Hollywood takes on the history and evolution of this delightful household pet.” —*International Film Festival Rotterdam*

“Jim Finn’s *Wüstenspringmaus*, a well-sprung, rear-screened account of a gerbil’s life in the Seventies.” —*Guy Maddin, Film Comment*

Decision 80 (10 min, video, 2003)

“‘Beam me up, Scottie, I think we really blew it.’ A timely look back at the mechanics of a painful historic moment.” —*Cinematexas Festival*

“A decisive moment in American history remixed into the prelude to your worst fucking nightmare.” —*New York Underground Film Festival*

super-max (13 min, 2003)

“Finn’s chilling *super-max* is a tour of maximum security prisons shot from a moving car, their hulking forms framed by telephone poles and power lines that divide landscape and sky. The concluding voice-over, making reference to Lewis and Clark, implicitly equates the European occupation of this continent with imprisonment.”

—*Fred Camper, Chicago Reader*

La Lotería (video series, 2004-5)

These videos I made over a two-year period as a series of sketches. I made each of them with one song in imovie to keep it as simple as possible. I reworked many of them and have others that I was never quite happy with and a few more in my head that never got into the computer. I spent on average around six months on each of my short films up to then and wanted to be able to free up and work in a faster, more improvisational style. It didn't always work that way since a few of the pieces I worked and reworked for months. But that was the idea. The themes, as usual, are love and the political Left.

el moro (2:30, 2004)

“Deep down, we have always suspected there must be some connection between J.R.R. Tolkien, Star Trek, and the rise of the radical Left. Leave it to Jim Finn to bring it all together.” —*New York Underground Film Festival*

el corazón (3:15, 2004) is about a mustached man who loves his team and his girl.

el paraguas (3:45, 2005) Donald Rumsfeld and Saddam Hussein met in 1985: “Oh the wind and the rain.”

la ardilla (2:00, 2004) “La Ardilla (2004), an entry in Jim Finn's “lotería” video series, samples a glowing Rocío Durcal and Juan Gabriel duet while the lovestruck Finn courts a skittish amour. As the legends croon, “desde el principio / te quiero, te quiero, te quiero”, Finn beckons tenderly, patiently, and finally has you, and the squirrel, nibbling from his seductively pursed lips. —*Senses of Cinema*

la estrella (2:30, 2005). Cosmonaut stamps and communist icons turn a Frank and Nancy Sinatra song into another *Internationale*.

el valiente (3:45, 2004) is a collection of the 70s Bond girls who never knew loneliness “until I met you.”

el pájaro (2:00, 2005) A major league baseball playoff game is the excuse for a world uprising.

la mano (2:00, 2005) A religious revival in the O.C.: “Prepare Ye the Way of the Lord!”

la cobra (2:30, 2004). A love song about a drowned girl is illustrated in a bath and tanning booth.

la corona (1:30, 2005) The Bush inner circle at Crawford moving to the sounds of the Mexican Frank Sinatra.

el azteca (3:00, 2005) Ricardo Montalban’s Khan in the 60s and the 80s is still fighting the good fight: “It’s not enough to pray!”

la calavera (3:00, 2004) “The repetitive missile from a war plane blurs into a war game. Add an uplifting song to it and you have a perfectly entertaining video game. Or is it reality? —*L.A. Freewaves*

3. INTERKOSMOS

3.1 DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Interkosmos started out in 2003 as a short film about an East German space mission whose communist mascot was the “meerschweinchen” or guinea pig. Planned originally as a sequel to my film about the capitalist “wüstenspringmaus” or gerbil, it began to grow to include a space capsule interior, humans in costume, and a dance number. I wanted the film to look as if I had been allowed to edit audio and film footage from the East German space archives. Many of the scenes are recreations and variations of actual training photos of the cosmonauts. The music is original, but I gave recordings of 70s German pop and international communist songs to the musicians for inspiration. I wanted the energy and idealism of the Marxist left to be a part of the film and to create a communist love story in the process as well as a kind of funeral dirge for a 75-year-old experiment in social and economic engineering.

Though the film is made in the style of a 70s documentary, it has the structure of a Hollywood musical. There is a musical number every 8-12 minutes, which was about standard in the MGM musicals. There is an overture, exit music, and a kind of intermission to the film—the field hockey number is right in the middle. A real intermission would not have worked in a 71-minute film. After nearly two years of trying to figure out the story and how to make it, we built the sets and started filming in March 2005. Although the story was mostly worked out ahead of time, I did not actually write the script until after filming. After a number of revisions, I had the dialogue and letters translated into German and found the voice actors to dub the film. And finally the musicians added part to make the film complete.

3.2 SCRIPT EXCERPT

3.2.1 NARRATION ONE (7:15 to 10:00)

The *Interkosmos* program organized collaborative space missions launched from the Soviet Union using scientists and cosmonauts from socialist and non-aligned nations. In the early 1970s the East German space program began preparations for an experimental communist space colonization mission called *Wundertüte*, named after a bag of goodies

given to German children. The surprise packages, in this case, were colonies to be set up on a moon of each of the gas giants of the outer solar system, Jupiter and Saturn. A project of this magnitude required the resources of all of the contributing nations of *Interkosmos* so each of the cosmonauts were chosen from a different donor nation.

Indian cosmonaut Nandini Khaund—call sign Seagull—was the first woman from a non-socialist state accepted into the cosmonaut program. She graduated at the top of her class in astrophysics at Patrice Lumumba People's Friendship University in Moscow. A field hockey captain, she became interested in the cosmonaut program when she traveled with her team to a Black Sea resort outside Odessa to take part in a tribute to the cosmonauts. There she met and befriended future cosmonaut Ulrich Brüns; the two of them vowed that weekend to apply to the *Interkosmos* program.

Call sign Falcon, Brüns was born in Moscow at the end of the war to German parents, whose communist credentials forced them out of Nazi Germany. His father became the head of counter-propaganda for the Ministry of State Security, known derisively as the Stasi. Ulrich grew up with his head patted by all of the major communist leaders of East Germany. After his time in the army, he studied electrical engineering and architecture before applying to the space program.

The two of them were chosen as the scientists for the two *Wundertüte* missions. Their pilots were both career ex-army men. Ukrainian-born Andrian Nicolayev—call sign Golden Eagle—was partnered with Falcon to pilot the spaceship Amber headed for Ganymede. And Yugoslavian cosmonaut Goran Milos—call sign Proton—was chosen to pilot the Valentina Tereshkova along with Seagull.



FIGURE 3.1 *Interkosmos* still: Cosmonaut Seagull

3.2.2 DIALOGUE TWO (SEAGULL FALCON) (11:00 to 19:00)

FALCON:

Amber to Valentina Tereshkova: 0740 Moscow Summer Time

SEAGULL:

Seagull here, Amber

FALCON:

Falcon here asking for telemetric data on the baby Salyut.

SEAGULL:

Routine manoeuvres: 269 378. The braking motor functioned just as it did in hydro-weightlessness.

FALCON:

And manoeuvre 223?

SEAGULL:

Normal. How's the Popovich ethnography?

FALCON:

I'm listening to the Genghis Khan history: 'Swarm of Falling Stars'. They all knew the same ballad, and when new laws or orders were introduced. They would sing them like new verses to an old song.

SEAGULL:

Like the Internationale. You must have memorized that tape by now.

FALCON:

I always pick up new details. Also, it drives out unwanted thoughts.

SEAGULL:

Like wanting a shower more than once a month?

FALCON:

Yesterday I had the same song in my head for hours. The Trolley Song.

SEAGULL:

What's that?

FALCON:

I don't know. You've heard it. Clang clang clang went the trolley. Da da da dada da

SEAGULL:

Don't know it.

FALCON:

Yes, you know it. Clang clang clang went the trolley Ding ding ding went the bell

Zing zing zing went my heartstrings. From the moment I saw him, I fell

SEAGULL:

Never heard it.

FALCON:

You know it. Chug chug chug went the motor. Bump bump went the brakes. Thump thump thump went my heartstrings. When he smiled, I could feel the car shake. Buzz buzz buzz went the buzzer. Plop plop plop went the wheels. Anyway you probably have it on tape somewhere.

SEAGULL:

Sounds like a capitalist love song.

FALCON:

Maybe, you don't like that music.

SEAGULL:

It's part of the same disease. Capitalism is like a kindergarten of boneless children. It looks good from the hallway, but when you get up close you can see how fleshy and rotten it is.

FALCON

Yes, but in German I think it is fine.

3.2.3 NARRATION TWO: (19:09 to 20:26)

Jupiter's moon Ganymede was chosen as the secondary wundertüte colony. It is the largest of Jupiter's many satellites and one of the four Galilean moons along with Io, Callisto and Europa. It was named after the abducted love of Jupiter the god, or Zeus in his Greek form. The beautiful boy Ganymede, son of the king of Troy, was carried away by Zeus in the form of an eagle.

The site for the wundertüte was to be the Uruk Sulcus, named after an ancient Sumerian city. The location worked because of its relatively smooth "ocean-like" surface and the additional benefit that its location has the least amount of micro-meteorite "garden-ing." The Ganymede wundertüte was designed to encourage entire families to relocate in the far reaches of the solar system. Built underneath two domes, one hard-fitted under the other, a peoples' carnival colony would be placed here as a kind of vacation spot for families on their way to or back from the massive industrial colony on Titan. It would also serve as a base for scientific studies of the moons and of Jupiter itself.

3.2.4 SEAGULL LETTER TWO (20:30 TO 22:15)

Ulrika W. and Jana L. asked about whether it will be feasible to have an all-woman space crew. I think it is likely and the reason is physical. Because we are smaller, we consume less and produce less waste. We also take up less room. There are new studies that show that women may actually be better suited for long-term space missions. The endothelium, which helps with blood flow and coagulation, is vulnerable to injuries in space. On the Apollo 15 moon mission, both of the American astronauts experienced severe swelling and pain in their fingertips. One of them later developed heart problems. It is difficult to treat these injuries in space because pharmaceuticals do not always work

as they do on Earth. The estrogen in our bodies actually strengthens the endothelium and so women are six times less likely to develop endothelial injuries.

3.2.5 NARRATION THREE (22:20 TO 24:30)

Until the wundertüte colonies were built, the crews would be based in orbiting space stations meant to hold the materials with which to build a new world as well as housing vast archives of a great orbiting Marx-Lenin Library of the History and Culture of International Communism. This was the brainchild of Max Zumwald. He felt that the period of peaceful detente in the 1970s between the Eastern Soviet Bloc and the capitalist West was a perfect opportunity to put funds into long-term projects to benefit all humanity. Another selling point was the risk—very real just a few years before—that relations between the superpowers could degenerate into nuclear war. If the capitalist powers provoked a global inferno to prevent their inevitable demise, then a permanent record would exist in the vacuum of space of the final evolution of human society: socialism.

Zumwald organized a conference of librarians from Eastern Bloc and third-world countries in Neustrelitz in 1975. He then assembled a team, including the head librarian of the State Library of Berlin, Ludmila Reimer, to put together thousands of microfiche documents, books, films, video and audiotapes and photographic slides to be organized in crates and launched to the holding spots in the months before the manned mission.

The Titan wundertüte was chosen as the primary site of the collection because of the unknown ground conditions on the moon. If it were not possible to establish a colony on the moon's surface, then the orbiting library could double as a colony base. The three ships would serve as sections of the library, which could be assembled in orbit and even added to in later years. Redundant and certain specialized materials would be placed in one of the supply ships headed for Ganymede to serve as a kind of branch library.

3.3 QUESTION AND ANSWER, AURORA PICTURE SHOW (Houston, September 9, 2007)

Interkosmos started out in 2003 as a short film about an East German space mission whose communist mascot was the *meerschweinchen* or guinea pig. Planned originally as a sequel to my film

The *meerschweinchen* part, which is the part with the guinea pigs, really does mean “little pigs from the sea.” So I started thinking about *kosmoschweinchen* as a play on words [“little space pigs”]. Then I found this Taschen design book—East German design book—and I found this thing called the *wundertüte*. Germans laugh at that part because it’s like a bag of goodies that they give to children. It means literally wonder bag. And actually I mistranslated it. I thought it was wonderbubble because I translated it on some online thing. So that’s how it became a bubble. Actually I messed it up but it kind of became funnier.

As far as this idea of the colonies on the moons of Saturn and stuff, I started thinking what would they do when they got out there. And I thought of this artist colony in space almost where they would do needlepoint and watch experimental videos and do scientific things. But they would also talk to each other in this strange poetic language and tell each other their dreams and things like that. I like this intersection between science and art and communism in space.

Then as far as the main narrative part of the story, I wanted to invert the classic Hollywood romantic comedy where there’s a man or a musical or say Debbie Reynolds [in *Singing in the Rain*] is working very hard as a dancer and then Gene Kelly is trying to make love to her. And she’s resisting him so she can continue with her career, and finally she gives up her career to go with him. And the same with Ninotchka with Greta Garbo who plays this Stalinist apparatchik. In the end, she gives up her career to be with this crappy French guy. And I thought, what if the crappy French guy had to give up his career to go with her and be a Stalinist. That was sort of the inversion of that. And I love a lot of those movies. Oftentimes you just have to drop the ending and you can still enjoy the movie.

AUDIENCE QUESTION:

That was one of the best renditions of the *Internationale* I’ve ever heard.

JIM FINN:

Well originally we were going to use all these classic Soviet songs like *Ochi Chornye* and all these traditional songs by the Red Army Choir, which are all actually vaguely familiar to us as Americans. In every documentary about Russia you always hear parts of them. People don’t really know what the songs are but they know the

Internationale, the Soviet anthem and so on. And so because of that, they end up being a little bit cliché. So when we watched the movie, the original end of the movie was a little weighed down by those sorts of clichés. When the musicians took that and came up with this new—it really just helped lift the movie out of that. One of the reasons I chose East Germany—two reasons: one I worked with the Goethe Institute. The head of the [Chicago] Goethe Institute translated everything for me in German and was so unbelievably efficient. And then the other part was to get away from these archetypes, stereotypes of Soviet culture. We don't really know much about East Germany. What do we know about East German culture? I mean there's athletes and hirsute women who would swim and have muscles and that's about it. What else do we really know about East Germany?

One thing I was interested in was creating a Utopian program in the 70s. I was interested in détente in the 70s. Things in the 80s got very weird with this monomania about Russia and all this. Obviously the Soviet Union fell apart and instead of having some normal potentially democratic mild transition out of this system, it just dropped into the nightmare, fascistic capitalism that they have right now, which isn't functioning necessarily all that great. So I thought well what if there had been a Utopian program to get back to these original ideals,

AUDIENCE QUESTION:

So where did you get the field hockey scene?

JIM FINN:

I grew up with field hockey. My sisters both played it. They won State in high school and one of my sisters got a scholarship to a Division I school. One thing in the Cold War—a bobsledder could be a symbol of international communism. I just went to Lake Placid recently and they're still living the dream. 1980. I mean we make the rules. If we're not good at it, then it doesn't count. So I like this idea of the field hockey women making the communist symbol with the torches. And in the narrative element, I do mention that Falcon and Seagull met at a sports conference.

AUDIENCE QUESTION [unintelligible]

JIM FINN:

I want to play with these boundaries in film. I enjoy watching documentaries. They set up the villains and they set up the hero. I enjoy that as much as anyone else. Why do I

begin to hate this person and why do I love this person? That's because the filmmakers are manipulating that. I feel that all these different things haven't really advanced us anywhere. We're still stuck in the same sort of problems. I'm actually really interested in these ideological critiques of capitalism. I'm interested in why they sometimes spin off into either dictatorship or fall into some of the same traps. But I also don't want to accept that they don't work. So this is another way to look at that in a seemingly light way—to really take a look at some of these ideological critiques but keep it deceptively light.

4. *LA TRINCHERA LUMINOSA DEL PRESIDENTE GONZALO*

4.1 DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

When members of the Peruvian Maoist revolutionary-terrorist group the Shining Path were captured and imprisoned, the authorities isolated them in their own cellblocks. The guerrillas thought of government prisons as just another front in the People's War calling them "shining trenches of combat". The prisoners organized propaganda, literature, and military classes as well as marches, criticism sessions, and dances. The Shining Path was known to recruit heavily among highland Indians and women. It had the highest proportion of women commanders in Latin American guerrilla history. One of the key roles for women, for example, was to perform the coup-de-grace on a wounded victim.

The film is filled with the esoteric rituals and dogmatic political theology creating by their leader, the former philosophy professor Chairman Gonzalo. It was shot in Hi-8 analog as if it were an amateur video made perhaps by the prisoners themselves in the late 80s. The location for the film was the New Mexico State Fairgrounds' 4H Youth Dormitory in the middle of Albuquerque. We painted it with Maoist murals and cast actors in New Mexico who could speak Spanish or Navajo (Dine'). Navajo is used because so much of the recruitment for the Shining Path was done in among the Quechua, Aymara and other Indian groups. Though the film is heavily researched and uses interviews and poems from guerrillas, it is a fictional film. In this fictionalized Shining Path world, Navajo is spoken in prison. The Navajo actors translated scenes from Macbeth into tape recorders and played it back to better the translation and memorize the dialogue. They helped create the performance as well as the sets for the Revolutionary Theater piece within the film. The rehearsals and choreography for the film were worked out with the help of Working Classroom, an Albuquerque theater group for artists from marginalized communities. Many of the actors were trained there and the collaboration with the organization helped create a real sense of community on the set.

The Shining Path had a unique way of speaking based on didactic Gang-of-Four or Cultural-Revolution Maoism and Gonzalo-Thought, basically the sayings of their leader

Guzman. The script is based on a core of interviews, readings and other research that was turned into a stylized version of a day in the life of the cellblock. The music for the film was created before filming by the same musicians that scored my film *Interkosmos*. I wanted the actors to be surrounded by the language, literature, art and music of the Shining Path to portray the characters as authentically as possible. I was drawn into making this film to try to understand how a 16-year-old Indian girl becomes a trained killer versed in Marxist rhetoric and willing to go to any lengths for a future society of great harmony. Though set in the late 80s, a movie about terrorist extremists locked away and forgotten in prison with nothing but their ideology has a relevance that doesn't seem to be fading any time soon. The extreme violence and ideological dogmatism of the Shining Path was seen at the time as an aberration among Latin American guerrilla groups, but now it seems that they were more in line with 21st-century guerrilla tactics.



FIGURE 4.1 *La Trinchera Luminosa del Presidente Gonzalo* still: The Denunciation of Comrade Lisandra

4.2 SCRIPT EXCERPT

4.2.1 INTERVIEW ONE (01:00-02:00)

QUESTIONER:

Didn't you travel with Chairman Gonzalo to the People's Republic of China?

COMANDANTE MECHE:

We were trained in politics, foreign affairs, Marxist philosophy, and military strategy and tactics. When we handled volatile chemicals they advised us to keep ideology in mind, and that this would enable us to do everything and to do it well. Later we learned to make our first demolition charges. At the end of the class, they told us anything could be converted to a bomb. Then they gave us pens that blew up. And when we sat down, our folders blew up as well. It was a sort of fireworks show perfectly measured to make us see that everything can be exploded if you put your mind to it.

4.2.2 INTERVIEW TWO (03:11-04:13)

QUESTIONER:

Didn't you never want to get married and have a normal life?

COMANDANTE LAURA:

I was married. I want to see my children some day like any other mother. But what kind of life am I providing them if I leave them a country that wants just to use them as grease-blood for their machinery. You might as well ask a guinea pig why it doesn't offer up more of its babies to the frying oil.

QUESTIONER:

But there are other options? There are mothers who work every day to make their country better.

COMANDANTE LAURA:

Yes, there are mothers who work every day to cover the social contradictions that keep will keep their grandchildren in the slaughterhouse of feudal capitalism. Children die of diseases that are preventable and men waste their lives in the useless service to a dying philosophy. There is no solution within capitalism. It's the past. It's like llama walking the same paths over and over again with bloody hooves. One day soon it will

realize that the stumps are useless and it will collapse. We'll be there to help it see its error.

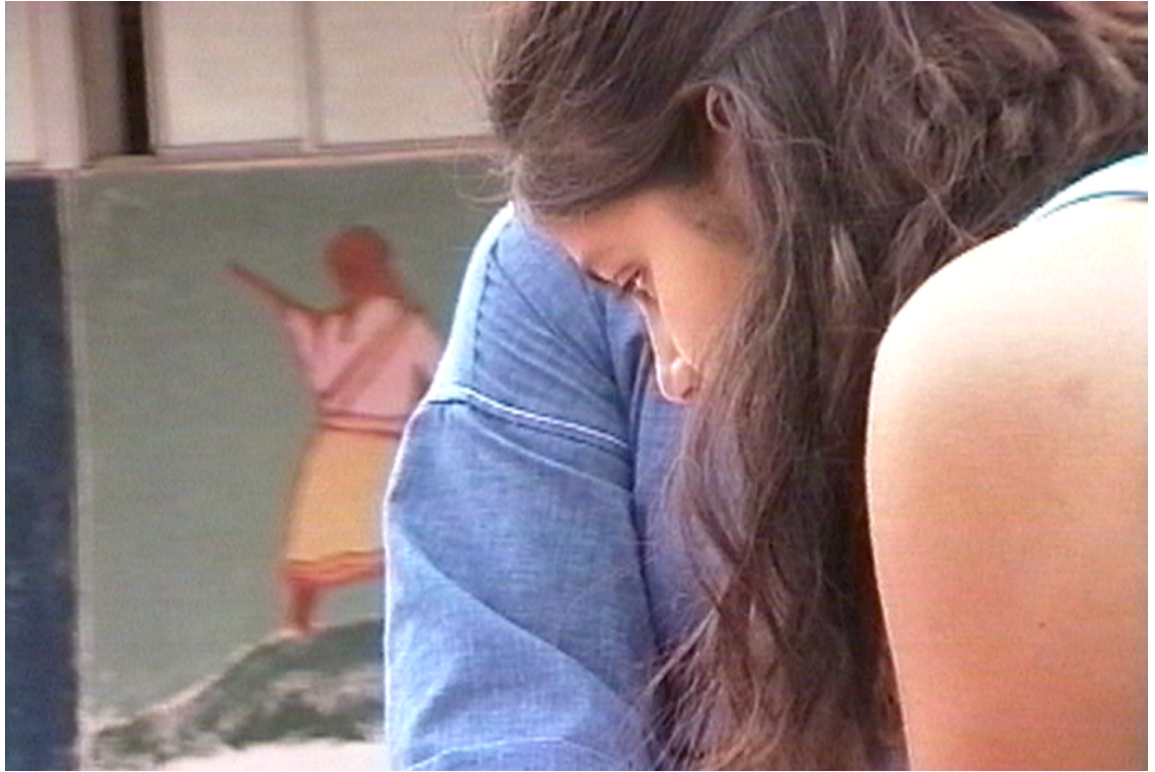


FIGURE 4.2 *La Trinchera Luminosa del Presidente Gonzalo* still: recess between classes

4.2.3 ESCUELA POPULAR (Discussion about revolutionary errors, 06:15-09:10)

COMANDANTE MECHE:

In 1982, the comrades arrived at the district of Santiago de Lucanamarca and gave the command to three brothers: Olegario, Gilbert and Nicanor. At first the population was happy. But once the military arrived, they turned against the population, against the Party. And the brothers had to hide in the hills. Not only that, the population went in search of Olegario until they found him in hiding. They brought him to the Plaza de Armas, where they beat him with axes, rocks. They set him on fire, and finally they shot him. And the punishment? Was that an excess?

REBECA:

Of course not. We can't allow the corrupt elements of the population to torture and murder our comrades.

GABRIELA:

Also, that's the same zone where Comandante Oscar was killed. The reactionaries have to know what happens if they kill one of us. They have to know that we are a hard bone to gnaw—that we are willing to do anything. Anything.

COMANDANTE MECHE:

Good, but where was the supposed excess?

LISANDRA:

The excess of the comrades wasn't the actual punishment but rather the type of punishment. In the outskirts of the village, they captured nearly 30 people including children. They killed them all with machetes and axes. It's all right not to waste bullets when executing snitches. But killing children and throwing boiling water is excessive. Later in the village, they gunned down the mayor. But they didn't give the coup de grace and he survived. So the comrades killed people that weren't involved in the murder of our commanders, and they let live the people who warned the "Sinchis" of our presence.

Moreover, after furiously killing so many people the comrades weren't thinking clearly. While they were looking for the list of snitches and preparing the trial of the other members of the community, a boy in the church rectory yelled out a warning about the supposed arrival of the reactionary forces. So there was a retreat, and all this was called the massacre of Lucanamarca. That was because the comrades acted with too much violence. Seventy people were killed after a party commander was burned to death.

REBECA:

If you kill a member of the member of the Party, the Party will wait for you like a tarantula waiting for a cricket.

COMANDANTE MECHE:

Right, but the punishment has to be scientific not simple vengeance.

REBECA:

Of course. It was an excess but not an error because the punishment is important. It was an excess when they killed indiscriminately and in a rage.

COMANDANTE MECHE:

Good. Who can tell me the objective of war?

GABRIELA

The objective of war is simply to conserve your own forces and destroy those of your enemy.

4.2.4 INTERVIEW THREE (09:32-11:10)

DAISY:

I went to work for this family when I was 12. I raised their children like they were my own brothers and sisters. The father had meetings all the time came home late a lot. In those days I did not understand the debt of 400 millions dollars that Peru owed the United States. I thought this man was involved in an industry that was for Peruvians. When my sister came to visit she explained to me what he did.

QUESTIONER:

She recruited you?

DAISY:

My job was simply to keep them informed of his movements: when he came home late and when he had meetings at the house. Later they asked details about the layout of his office and of the home.

QUESTIONER:

Did you know he was to be assassinated along with the trade representative?

DAISY:

My job was to give them information. I never asked anything.

QUESTIONER:

After the assassination, how did you get caught?

DAISY:

I didn't think I was a suspect. I took care the children during the funeral and for months afterwards. I also took care of the baby because the mother was too depressed to touch it. But my sister was killed in a police ambush and I was detained under the "Terrorism Protection Act."

QUESTIONER:

Were you abused in prison?

DAISY:

I was raped and tortured just like all of the compañeras here. Especially more since I would not give any compañeros names. But I confessed to giving the information to my sister. She was dead so I could not be accused of being a snitch.

QUESTIONER:

Don't you feel sorry for the children that helped to orphan?

DAISY:

It is unfortunate for them, but it is better to have a dead father than a live traitor.

4.2.5 SOCCER MATCH SONG (11:12-13:30)

The Red Army powerfully grabs
its machetes with callused hands
We are ready for the struggle in combat
A combat until the death
The Red Army powerfully grabs
its machetes with callused hands
We are ready for the struggle in combat
A combat until the death
Forward, Red Army
Chairman Gonzalo calls us to fight
But from the Andes to the Atlantic Ocean
the Red Army is the strongest army of all
Let the Red Army bring its dead
Across rivers of blood
Purifying the country with rifles
Draining the blood of the exploiters
Let the Red Army bring its dead
Across rivers of blood
Purifying the country with rifles
Draining the blood of the exploiters
The green army and the black barons

are preparing us for the capitalist throne
But from the Andes to the Atlantic Ocean
the Red Army is the strongest army of all
The Red Army powerfully grabs
its machetes with callused hands
We are ready for the struggle in combat
A combat until the death
The Red Army powerfully grabs
its machetes with callused hands
We are ready for the struggle in combat
A combat until the death

4.3 QUESTION AND ANSWER, GUILD THEATER (Albuquerque, September 7, 2007)

JIM FINN:

I wanted to make a movie that looked a little bit like a failed propaganda film. In other words the idea that I had was: how could a group get in to film the Shining Path in a prison that they controlled unless they were somewhat sympathetic to the group. So the idea was that it wasn't a Shining Path film crew but it was a film crew that was sympathetic enough to them. But then the final thing that they put together I think wouldn't have been satisfying to the members of the Shining Path because I think it reveals a little too much about the intense ideology and indoctrination and sort of cult-like behavior of the group. But that's the way it was put together and I wanted it to serve the function of a nameless ideology. In other words I wanted us to look at these interviews...I mean we all want to know who these women are. Who's your mother? Who's your daughter? Who's your—you know—here do you come from? Why did you get into this? But no one talks about this. I felt like in a group like this, no one would talk about that. No one would talk about their brother who's sick or their dad beat them or they love their dad or they love their mom. What was important was the group and the revolution and looking towards the future. However they got there wasn't really as important as how they got to where they were. Maybe they might say a little bit here and there but it wouldn't be much. So I

wanted the rules of the film to be governed by what they—I felt that they set up the rules and I could only work within those rules. So that's a little bit about where it came from. I wanted it to look as realistic as possible so we got the costumes ahead of time; we got the murals done; we got the music ahead of time. And we put everybody in there and just threw everyone into this so they would be just sort of taken over by this ideology. Obviously none of these women are prisoners—the actors—and only one of them was Peruvian. Maybe that's a good place to start.

AUDIENCE QUESTION:

In the 70s, all these countries were military countries, like Chile, Argentina. Why did you choose Peru?

JIM FINN:

I tell you why I chose Peru. First of all Peru in the 80s was actually not a military government. It was actually a democracy. It was a military government in the 70s. When they turned into a democracy is when the Shining Path got activated. The reason—I feel for one thing there's a lot of films about guerrilla groups in Latin America. They're either very sympathetic to the groups or maybe they're critical or they're critical of the military. The Shining Path was always considered an aberration. It was never—no Marxist in Latin America would take credit for the Shining Path. They always felt that it was really an extremist group that was just about murder and mayhem. It wasn't really about a revolution. They were just really killers. That's how most people on the Left—I'm talking about the Left—obviously the right wing believes all Marxists are killers or are all Marxist are insane, but I'm talking about on the Left. And in fact the Shining Path targeted people on the Left. The reason I was drawn to the group was for a couple of reasons. One, they had a very high proportion of women commanders. Even though the group was like one man and had this very patriarchal almost totalitarian ideology, it still had a lot of room for women to—empowered is probably the wrong word because it's such a disturbing cult-like group. But in fact women did have a lot of control and power within the structure of the group, more than any other guerrilla group in la guerrilla history. So that was interesting to me, and the fact that they were so repellant. They were sort of disturbing as a group and [as an] ideology but then really fascinating. And the fact that they took so much from China and from Russian and, you know, much less than

they did from their own experience. Most other Latin America guerrilla groups in the 60s and 70s really looked at Fidel. They really looked at Cuba and they said this is what we have to do. Cuba did it; we can do it. Or they looked at Chile. Chile was the democratic socialism and in a sense Chavez right now is an example of what maybe [Salvador] Allende [in Chile] could have been. He was democratically elected, accused of being a Marxist, overthrown, and killed. And the same thing happened in Caracas, in Venezuela only it didn't work—the coup didn't work and so Chavez is still there. And so that's sort of an interesting thing. And so I'm interested in all these different groups. But the reason I chose the Shining Path is because they were this intense group. They almost took over Peru. When they captured [Abimael] Guzmán, the leader Chairman Gonzalo, the group was beheaded. It basically went underground and almost went under. They're still around; they exist but they don't have the same level of force and they most likely never will. I don't know maybe they will. I haven't followed them lately. It [the media] was like oh yeah well forget about them. And I started doing research and I just kept doing research. I was doing research originally on all these different groups in Latin America and I just kept focusing on them and couldn't get away from it. So that's why? Anybody else?

AUDIENCE QUESTION:

Why are you interested in communism?

JIM FINN:

Well I've been interested in communist ideology, Marxist ideology and filmmaking for a number of years. In general, left wing ideology. I consider myself part of the left wing ideologically. That's where my political interests lie. On the other hand I don't believe in violence. I mean I'm not going to tell a peasant they shouldn't kill someone who's attacking them. But I'm not a Gang-of-Four Maoist or whatever.

I wanted to make a movie where I could try and get in the heads of how people are like this because I feel like in the States it's almost impossible for us to grasp what it's like. Even though people are oppressed in this country to a certain degree. There's poverty and racism or different issues that there are in poor countries. It's really different the level of political activism. No one really would ever think about trying to get together in a guerrilla group sort of thing. We have democratic—I mean it does happen

rarely every 30 to 40 years or whatever—but when you are living somewhere with a really weak democratic structure, what are the options? It's [Shining Path ideology] one of the most extreme options. The film before this was also a little bit lighter. I focused on the communist ideology of East Germany, with the space program. It was a little bit lighter. My next film is about North Korea. It's a little bit of an examination, It's also a little bit lighter. It's a little bit funnier than this one.

But in all three films I'm also examining art. You know this idea of how people make...This idea of revolutionary art. What does revolutionary art mean? Really in a sense this prison is a little bit like an artist colony. They're creating music; they're making paintings; they're reading poems. I mean there's a very strict definition of what kind of art you can make and you know any deviation would be revisionist or bourgeois art. My previous film *Interkosmos* had people sort of making or working on this idea of experimentation in art in outer space. My next film has this sort of theme. And in a sense this is what I'm interested in. I'm interested in the sort of artistic impulses in a revolutionary society in the early Cuban revolution or in the early Soviet revolution. As these revolutions go on the art gets sort of channelized into state-sanctioned art and in communism it's often called socialist realism, which, is why the women in the Shining Path have the guns and it's heroic and is almost kitschy. It wouldn't be considered great art. I feel like I'm taking that so that's another level I'm working on.

AUDIENCE QUESTION:

Well, I'd like to say that well these women are looking forward and their previous history doesn't matter. But if you look at In the Zapatista movement, there's all sorts of documentation of why women went into the movement. And the Sandinistas, too. And why not Sendero Luminoso?

JIM FINN:

Right that's a good question. It's not that I don't think that they would ever think about it. I think there is—it's just that I had to focus my film on something. What I wanted to focus on was—I'm not exactly interested in explaining where the Shining Path came from. There have been documentaries about that. I think there's a lot of research that's been done. But I don't think there's ever been—I mean I've never seen a piece of film or media that gets into the kind of totality of what these people believe in. What

when they wake up in the morning what they're thinking about. Everything they do; they have classes. I did this research so I really wanted to show what was going on in the prison. You can kind of draw your own conclusions about where they came from. One of the analyses of the Shining Path was that there was actually a left-wing military government in the late 60s and early 70s in Peru and so they created universities and created schools and a lot of these schools were taken over by people like Gonzalo who did teacher training stuff [i.e., indoctrinating a generation of teachers to be Cultural Revolution Maoists]. What it was, it was the first generation of people that went to college. Their parents were illiterate or semi-illiterate. They went to college and they go to get a job and people look at them as Indians. They don't get a job as a secretary. They don't get a job. So what do they do? They're angry about this. They fight and they get sucked into this vortex of the Shining Path. But I felt like that wasn't really my story. What I'm doing is one small part of it. I could only focus on one thing. I'm just going to do this thing in the prison. I didn't really have an omniscient narrator. I mean that way that I could have explained that was

I could have used this footage and have an omniscient narrator explain what is going on. That's a classic documentary strategy. I didn't want to do that. I wanted to throw people in there. And I also felt that if you are forced to be oppressed by this environment and this ideology, you might have a visceral idea of what these women would be dealing with. I feel oftentimes that people in a documentary want an intellectual idea: OK, if I understand where they came from; I understand they're peasants; I understand they got sucked into this. And I understand that then you have this analysis, but you don't understand because you haven't lived it. I haven't lived it. I feel a film like this kind of throws you into the prison. You become a fly on the wall within the prison, and you're going 'what the hell's going on?' But if you were a fly on the wall in the prison, you wouldn't know what the hell is going on. No one's going to stop and look at you and say, oh well this is what's this is about and this is what this is about. And you're just kind of doing your best. I think that's what's difficult about the film. I leave you without a life raft—you're looking around going I don't know what's going on, why is this person [the director] doing this to me. I'm not doing it to torture you. I knew it was going to be difficult going in. I made it and this the way that I went into it, but I felt like I wanted to

look at this and make something that was very close to propaganda and something that would almost be approved by the Shining Path but really wouldn't be.

5. THE JUCHE IDEA

5.1 DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Juche is the philosophy of Kim Il-Sung, the former North Korean dictator, and his son Kim Jong-Il. Translated as self-reliance, it is a hybrid of Confucian and Stalinist authoritarian pseudo-socialism. One of the ways Kim Jong-Il consolidated his power was by promoting his father's cult of personality through the development of a *Juche*-oriented cinema. He even went so far as to order the kidnapping of a South Korean filmmaker and his actress wife in the 70s so they would use their capitalist training to better the North Korea cinema. This film is based on the story and videos created by a fictional video artist kidnapped by the regime in the late 90s to make *Juche*-oriented video art.

The narrative premise is that she was invited to do a scholarly residency in North Korea and is not being told when she can return. She is put up in the countryside at what is called a *Juche*-training farm. It is a farm set up to look like a typical small-capitalist farm with barn. The founder of North Korea, Kim Il-Sung, saw himself as a natural leader of non-aligned nations like Yugoslavia's Tito, but his philosophy never caught on outside his country. So in the film, the North Koreans have created an ersatz rural capitalist countryside with lectures analyzing capitalist society so that the farm residents can better create *Juche* propaganda for the international masses and help to realize Kim Il-Sung's dream. The other reason to using a rural setting is that many North Korean films are set in rural areas and about solving society's problems communally with the guidance of the Dear Leader Comrade Kim Jong Il.

The film is told through the main character Yoon-Jung Yi's video art, conversations, interactions around the farm, lectures, educational videos about capitalism and English classes. At the farm she has a room with a video editing system where she makes her work. Through the interviews, the audience at first takes her at her word, but as the film progresses there is some doubt as to whether she actually believes in the *Juche* philosophy or is living and working under a kind of benevolent house arrest.



FIGURE 5.1 *The Juche Idea* still: Yoon Jung reading her Juche poem at the Mass Games

5.2 SCRIPT EXCERPT

5.2.1 INTERVIEW ONE (Greenhouse)

INTERVIEWER:

We are here today with Jung Yoon Lee, the Korean-Japanese artist who is part of the international Juche Farm Residency outside Arirang. How are you?

JUNG YOON:

Great.

INTERVIEWER:

I would like to start with politics. You were recently in the United States. What do you think of activities of the present American administration's activities?

JUNG YOON:

It reminds me of the myth of the nymph trying to teach a goat to read. She bought so many books and the goat was very happy and seemed to respond well to her lessons so she kept teaching and teaching through the night until she fell asleep exhausted. When she woke up, the ungrateful goat had eaten all the pages and chewed up the binding. Out of anger, she slit its throat and drained its blood.

INTERVIEWER:

You lived in the U.S.

JUNG YOON:

I studied in the US. I watched TV and saw these White House people walking the grounds like Spandau-prison fascists. Really these people are barely human. They might as well be creatures living in dark trees that mock passersby.

INTERVIEWER:

But the country is so rapacious. It's always invading or threatening to invade someone. It's hard to believe that people there can't be aware of that.

JUNG YOON:

True, but it's not like the old British lion leaping from one continent to another. American-style imperialists are ectotherms: ambush predators that save their energy soaking in the sun to better take advantage of the prey bumbling into its path.

INTERVIEWER:

Could tell us what your days are like here?

JUNG YOON:

For one thing, I have had more work opportunities here in two months than I have in the last ten years. But not all the work is so technical. One of the daily farm chores we have to do to earn our keep along with weeding, tending the crops, cleaning chicken shit, and helping with evening lectures. Because I'm South Korean and lived in Japan, they assume that I am professionally trained to do everything. This isn't like a Western art residency. Here you work on your own projects but you also help others by training them and you learn new skills yourself. It's very communitarian.

INTERVIEWER:

What other jobs do you have?

JUNG YOON:

I'm continuing with my own videos. And we've been developing closed-circuit television shows in English and an internet broadcast in Juche film theory. English video classes.

INTERVIEWER:

Are there other international artists there?

JUNG YOON:

There's a Russian actor but no one else here lived in Japan and certainly no South Koreans. It's quite diverse really. There's farmers who paint, welders who write, anti-capitalist English teachers, Stalinist vegetarians. Bulgarians. There's all kinds. Most of the residents, of course, are North Korean.

INTERVIEWER:

How do you get along with them?

JUNG YOON:

Everyone is an artist here: writers, actors, painters. We wake up in the morning and do our chores and then everyone disappears for the day and comes back again for the evening lectures. Some kind of rodents are eating the cabbage. Tonight there is a vigil to stay awake and try to kill them. I think I might sleep though.

5.2.2 INTERVIEW THREE (Chicken Coop)

INTERVIEWER:

How did you decide to come to North Korea?

JUNG YOON:

They said they had an artist residency where I could work with North Korean artists and technicians.

INTERVIEWER:

Why didn't you work in the film industry in your adopted country. It seems as though you have the talent for that.

JUNG YOON:

I'd rather work in a sewage treatment plant without a respirator.

INTERVIEWER:

What was it like making your kind of films in the US and Japan?

JUNG YOON:

Making non-commercial movies in a capitalist country is like building a homemade floating barge in a bay. People are charmed, supportive and even offer bits of lumber or some indoor-outdoor carpeting. But when it comes time to launch your clunky house-

boat, no one notices because they are all crowding the bridge rail to watch the cruise ship grease its diesel bilge and raw sewage out onto the open ocean.

INTERVIEWER:

Doesn't the state support the arts?

JUNG YOON:

In Europe it does, though it's really just a subsidy to artificially prop up an industry that in the much-touted free-market system would shrink to near oblivion. In the US state arts funding is basically for symphonies and education. There is some money for individual artists on a more local level and from private foundations but it's ultimately very little. Imagine skinny Mexican dogs in a street market fighting over avocado rinds and you'll get an idea of what's it is like to try and make it as an artist in that country.

INTERVIEWER:

How old were you when you moved to Japan?

JUNG YOON:

I grew up in South Korea until age 9 and came to live in Japan with my aunt when my mom died. My family in South Korea are all lower middle-class petit bourgeois. My family in Japan are all more or less communists and run three Pachinko parlors.

INTERVIEWER:

What about your father?

JUNG YOON:

He's quite elderly actually. My mother was young when he married her and he had never been married before or since. We are in touch but are really not too close. I don't think he'd mind though. He wants to see the country unified again.

INTERVIEWER:

What did your family in Japan think of you coming here?

JUNG YOON:

They were proud. Well actually my aunt was proud. My cousins thought I was crazy for accepting. They said I was going to be thrown in a gulag and that I would have to raise rats in my shack to get enough protein. My aunt is part of the Japan-Korea Friendship Organization. That's who sponsored my trip. It is an open organization and is considered a charity though some have called us the North Korean yakuza.

INTERVIEWER:

When you came here, one writer compared you to the aging Ezra Pound, who had a pro-fascist radio show in Mussolini's Italy.

JUNG YOON:

Well like many who are fooled by fascism, his paranoid fear of Jews was really a kind of ethnocentric fear of capitalism. I suppose it's an honor to be compared to him even as an insult. I've been called much worse.

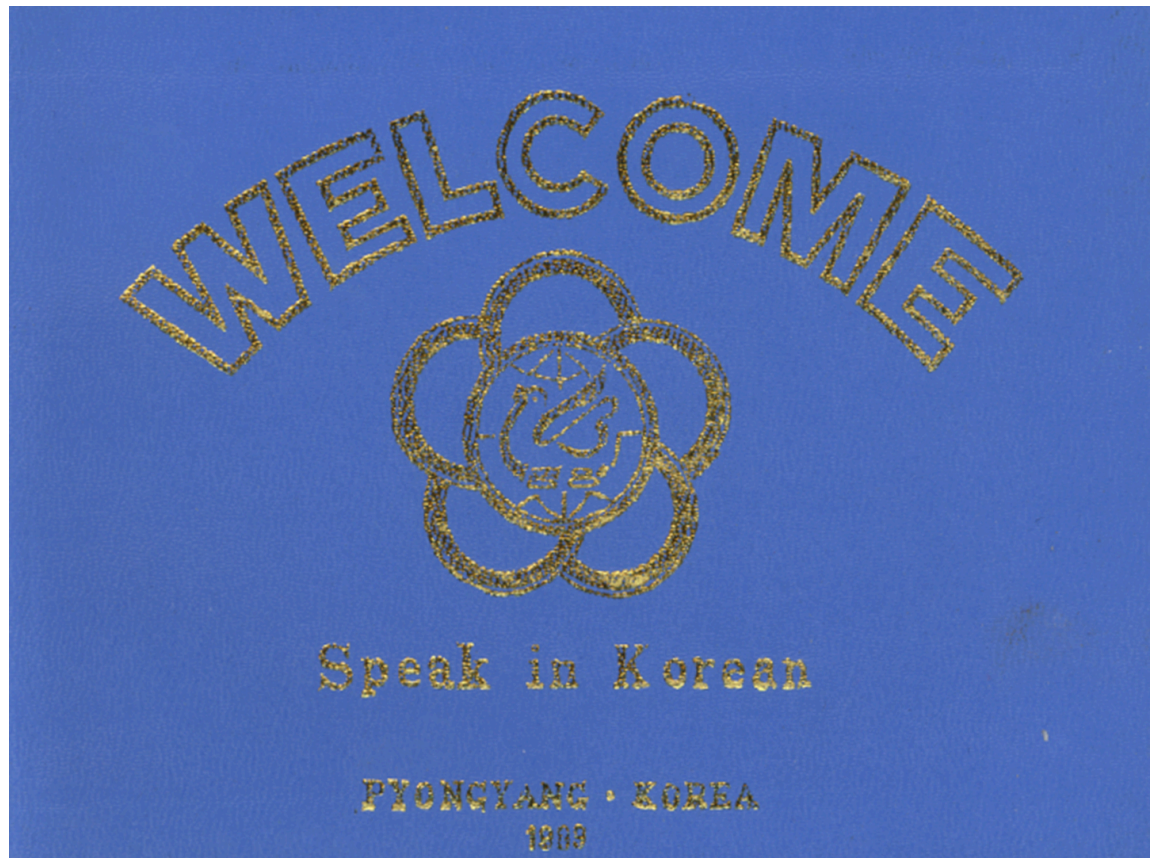


FIGURE 5.2 Cover, Korean-language guidebook used as a title card (North Korea)

5.2.3 INTERVIEW FOUR (Barn)

JUNG YOON:

In some ways this country and Cuba perhaps are like medieval monasteries preserving the sacred books in the Dark Ages. With the same temptations to alter the texts and re-write the histories to better adapt to their situation. I feel like I know how my ancestors lived since I've come here. The kind of Confucian community values and the lack of modern - capitalist - worries and anxieties... But I do have communication

problems sometimes. I mean I spoke about my pet guinea pig having eye surgery and the director was horrified. He did not understand why anyone would perform such difficult and exact surgery on a small animal that serves no scientific or societal purpose. I explained to him the economic theory that money goes from one part of the economy to another creating jobs along the way. He told me I was confused because in fact that money is taken away from working people to enrich the professional class for useless or redundant expenditures for a tiny proportion of the society. Removing a guinea pig's eye, he said, is blinding a small factory boy who has to slave in a fascist tropical dictatorship so that citizens can have more money and goods to give to the upper classes. He was nice and said it was not my fault since I was bombarded with lies from the time I was a babe.

INTERVIEWER:

Have you been able to see much of the countryside?

JUNG YOON:

I have been doing some exploring and found this cave near the farm. It reminds me of the Pitcairn Island cave. Fletcher Christian used to hide out and brood at the cave. He kept writing utensils, paper, guns and ammunition to protect him from drunken mutineers, kidnapped Polynesians, and the British navy and brooded over his imprisonment.

INTERVIEWER:

So what are your next projects? They told me there would be Anti-capitalist English classes as well as an action film.

JUNG YOON:

I am editing those now. We use these tapes for closed-circuit video classrooms. And we're still working on the script for the futuristic movie.

INTERVIEWER:

Science fiction?

JUNG YOON:

Well, yes sort of. A science fiction movie about a future world where North Korea's borders have been irradiated with tiny Macarthur nukes. They sent me an assistant to develop it. I am going to use this as an excuse to go to Pyongyang. A sci-fi city if ever there was one. I want to shoot in some of the old churches.

INTERVIEWER:

Why were you interested in coming here?

JUNG YOON:

Well, I was approached and agreed to do it. It sounded interesting. I mean I knew that Kim Jong Il was a film theoretician. Most people have no idea of this. The image is of a madman who dabbles in film for thrills.

INTERVIEWER:

The image of him outside is quite different than in this country.

JUNG YOON:

Yes, of course. I mean he's stereotyped. Of course stereotypes have some basis in reality. So in the US, he is seen as a maniac sweating with his finger on a nuclear button and in Japan he's seen as a mad emperor: planting tulip gardens, watching blackface Judy Garland musicals and listening to Europop.

INTERVIEWER:

Really?

JUNG YOON:

The point of all this is not to take the man seriously. I just decided to ignore all that and look at his film theories the way I would any other theory. And so I am adapting some of my own ideas and practices to his *Juche* theory of cinema.

5.3 GRADUATE CRITIQUE EXCERPT (R.P.I., December 10, 2007)

AMANDA

One of the reasons is to talk about the other than your own is to critique your own culture. How do your language issues and foreign-ness do this? It seems like it somehow lets the audience distance themselves.

JIM

I do think that humor can distance the audience and working in another language also does. The other perspective I have is that I have lived outside the US and I've learned another language and have studied three other languages and out perspective in the US is so limited. Even on the Left, we still only see the world with this imperialist baggage. Where most of the people are living that are affected by capitalism but they

aren't constantly affected by what's happening in the US. Also, this allows me to create my own fictional world. One thing that allows me to come in to another culture is the communist thing because I know a fair amount about it and I've read a lot. I lived and worked in southern Mexico and Guatemala. The civilian base of the left-wing insurgency had these various lines of Marxist ideologies, and every group was aligned with one of these groups. So it's interesting to deal with this medieval differentiation within the Left, the atomization of the different lines, each one believing they have the right one. And I want to have a critique not just of capitalism but also of the Left, of the authoritarian tendencies and the atomization of the Left.

AMANDA

I am still a little hung up on the language. I'm wondering how an audience who understands the language is going to see this.

DAVID

I'm surprised to hear there's a political meaning I'm supposed to get out of it. Politically it seems very confused to me. The people who are presented to criticize American imperialism are from countries that are not exactly shining lights of democracy. So I'm prepared to accept it because it's funny and for the exoticism of taking this Korean thing and I guess I'm concerned about how one can accept this message to get across.

JIM

I certainly don't see it as a message. I'm just telling you where I'm coming from when I'm making it. It is funny and I'm kind of letting it roll with this humor idea. There are some in jokes about film and film theory and these are the motivations I have when I start and what the audience gets out of it, I don't know. I have mixed feelings. On the one hand there is a state sponsored critique of capitalism and of filmmaking. Of course they aren't critiquing their own system.

NEIL

I feel that the political focus and satire doesn't come across to me are really well thought out. I mean it's fun to be confusing and it jumps around. But to feel that there is a double barreled critique of Western thought and politics though—I thought there were a bunch of quick shots that were funny.

JIM

The idea is that she made the pieces about capitalism and English as a Socialist Language and Flesh Ring. And she made the piece about Dentures of Imperialism. So in a sense these are dramatic monologues. I'm trying to think about this character. She's a South Korean socialist who's in North Korea. I'm hoping you get this from the whole movie the idea of the unreliable narrator. Does she really believe this? In the end does she still believe this? Does she really want to clean chicken shit? Does she want to make propaganda films? I don't know. I also felt that I couldn't work with an American—that they wouldn't allow an American there.

MARY ANNE

There are these threads here of totalitarianism. The best moments were when they were talking about the West. I thought there was something very unique happening, a very complex layering. This layered critique was perversely funny.

AMANDA

I have a question about audience.

JIM

My audience is from video art and I started doing art shows in the Chicago art community and that's where it started. The tours that I've been on in universities, microcinemas and cinemathèques have been important to building and getting to know my audience. And internationally they've played well. It has played in galleries but I don't think they work as well in that environment. Single channel is really the best venue. And it's even better when I'm there so people don't get any funny ideas.

KATHLEEN

Can you talk about the disabled soldier bit?

JIM

That's a fascist totalitarian thing. The disabled soldier is the ultimate sacrifice of the nation. That scene was very striking because it was a criticism scene in the film. It's offensive; it's funny; it's also really touching. I have mixed feelings and then I read the theory and put that theory, that text, next to it. And it's looking at that model of the totalitarian, pseudo-communist society. There are two other films of the English as a

Capitalist Language and I'm hoping that the political elements will pan out more by the end of the film.

KATHLEEN

The construct within the construct within the construct of the film is very intricate and very moving. And I'm wondering how much people get that or not.

JIM

Well I feel I make films on a couple different levels. I have the ability to make people laugh so you can watch them on a different level. I feel frankly that if you watch the films a couple times, you get something different. Some people like my films because they're funny some don't like them because they I'm politically reactionary or making fun of the Left or confused politically. In a sense I have an inner Trotskyite child that I fight against. And that comes in the movie and that's kind of an in-joke on myself or people I know.

DAVID

Why are you fighting it?

JIM

Because I don't want to be a Trotskyite. I've known a lot of Trotskyites. They're cool on the one hand. Trotsky was cool, I mean. They're better than Stalinists. But at least Stalinists did something. And made mistakes. Trotskyites never seem to do anything. They're always on the sidelines criticizing everyone else.

BRANDA

Media literacy is a thread in your work examining how you can use cinematic language to create power. In a way we we're laughing like we're not like them. But your point is that we are set in a set of language and industry traps just like they are. In a sense we are all trapped in a residency here.

MIKE

I also see a critique of critiques. These characters are intensely looking at systems and critiquing systems and it's not just ironically trashing these systems. But there's a lot of care in the humor.

DARA

Did you write the language part with the woman in the office?

JIM

That's audio from the Voice of America, which is a radio—started as a way to promote US culture in the 50s and anti-communism. They have these radio shows and everything is very skewed towards business. So that's edited to sound more insane than it is.

DARA

Then as a follow-up, the leads are women of color of the three films you've done. So I'd like you to talk about why these films about communist ideology with these women.

JIM

I chose Nandini Khaud as an Indian cosmonaut in an East German program. Then I made a movie based in Peru and now with Korea, I'm not sure women of color is exactly what I'm thinking about when I start. I'm trying to think about characters and the role of women within revolution. One that's not been a big focus on film. Usually in a revolution, a typical role women are portrayed are, for example in Vietnam, the women are the ones who fixed the Ho Chi Minh trail. Very little is given to about what exactly the role is of women within a revolutionary context.

AMANDA

Who is your audience? I don't think you've answered it. You talked about the history of your screenings.

JIM

I feel that one of things that working in the longer form has allowed me to do is to reach a wider audience. I've had more press in the last three years than in the previous seven years. I think the 3- or 10-minute films I've made are awesome and I stand by them. But the reality is that unless you have a gallery representing you, you're not going to get the promotion. I'm trying to make films that are going to be seen but that are criticizing and developing the actual film language. So the reason I talk about the history of my screenings is that I'm not just making work in a tube. I'm not just floating and saying people think I'm genius. Some people love my work and some people don't.

AMANDA

I think television might be a good though.

JIM

Television would be a disaster because they'd just change the fucking channel. They're not going to have any patience to sit and watch a film within a film. They're gonna say, "What is this crappy film? There's text on the side, this is insane." And also the part with Oleg and his ears is very funny. But taken out of context, I'm just making fun of a big-eared Russian guy. To me it's very important to have the whole film. I feel I've expanded my audience into international film festival and out of experimental and underground festival. So I feel I'm expanding my audience.

PAULINE

You've got something like eight disciplines in your work: music, sound design, text, image, theater, politics, history, theory. There's probably more. I just want to ask if you believe in egalitarian principles?

JIM

Yes.

PAULINE

Then I just want to speak up for music, which is always the stepchild of film and can really complement your work. Maybe you could have a scene and that scene could carry a sound design somehow. I would suggest you review your entire soundtrack.

JIM

The sound is the last thing I work on and right now it's scratch track and maybe we can talk about it more.

6. PRESS

6.1 SELECTED REVIEWS: *INTERKOSMOS*

6.1.1 VARIETY (March 2006)

"A delightfully tongue-in-cheek homage to a fictional East German space project, Jim Finn's "Interkosmos" uses recreated newsreels combined with musical interludes to resurrect the '70s in all its Brezhnev-era glory. Similar in its mockumentary approach to "First People on the Moon" but with a broader sense of wry fun, pic uncannily captures the self-glorifying hyperbole and straight-faced seriousness of the Communist bloc's attempts to make a splash in the race to space. Adventurous fest audiences will best appreciate this genuine crowd-pleaser. (*Jay Weissberg*)

6.1.2 VILLAGE VOICE (New York, March 2006)

"Jim Finn's *Interkosmos*, a retro gust of Communist utopianism, is set to open the New York Underground Film Festival on March 8. A cosmonaut romance set aboard a 1970s East German space mission to colonize the moons of Saturn and Jupiter, *Interkosmos* weaves together lovingly faked archival footage, charmingly undermotivated musical numbers, propagandistic maxims ("Capitalism is like a kindergarten of boneless children"), stop-motion animation (of a suitably crude GDR-era level), a Teutonic (and vaguely Herzogian) voiceover, and a superb garage-y Kraut-rock score (by Jim Becker and Colleen Burke). Finn's deadpan is immaculately bone-dry, and his antiquarian fastidiousness is worthy of Guy Maddin." (*Dennis Lim*)

6.1.3 THE STRANGER (Seattle, August 2006)

Interkosmos, the first feature from experimental shorts director Jim Finn, successfully bridges the gap between the filmmaker's noggin and the comprehension of the audience. Not every notion fully registers, but Finn scores enough hits to mark this poker-faced saga of far-out space nuts as a transcendent goof.

Shot in an artfully cruddy mix of Super 8 and 16 mm, the film purports to tell the story of the theoretical East German space program, complete with a series of hilariously low-rent training programs and stress tests (watch out for the tarantula). From this fertile premise, Finn constructs a rather astonishing replica of boxy '60s Soviet style and tone,

bolstered by a series of barely-there special effects (the Tinkertoy space colony is a particular delight), and a propulsive, gloriously kitschy soundtrack. The absurdly extended end-credit/musical coda sequence alone may be enough to warrant admission.

Narratively speaking, the film focuses on the burgeoning romance between female cosmonaut "Seagull" and the fiercely mustached "Falcon," mainly conducted via intercom from their respective orbits around the moons of Jupiter and Saturn. Any real semblance of plot, however, is continually at the mercy of whatever the director feels like riffing on at the moment, be it a digression on the socialist nature of dolphins, or stop-motion animation of a guinea pig in a spacesuit, or, in what may be the film's highlight, a gloriously lead-footed musical number performed by rival field hockey teams. Taken individually, these scattershot non sequiturs don't always fly, with perhaps one too many musical interludes. On the whole, however, Finn's seemingly random whims combine to form some sort of wobbly, infectious gestalt. "Capitalism is like a kingdom of boneless children," Seagull wistfully intones at one point. Trust me, it works in context. (*Andrew Wright*)

6.1.4 FILMMAKER (November 2007)

Part loving art-doc recreation, part comedic musical, *Interkosmos* may be the best communist propaganda since 1955, a genre that excelled in style and mathematic form. It revels in the Russian avant-garde cinematics that bled into its bombastic government documentaries. Once some human issues come up (birds and bees and astronauts), the film gets realistic and funny. Although you are never quite sure what filmmaker Jim Finn takes seriously, alternating between laughs and existentialist atmosphere, as if it was a predecessor to the new Daft Punk film *Electronoma*.

Following the space exploits of cosmonauts Seagull and Falcon, East Germans on their way to conquer moons of Jupiter and Saturn, *Interkosmos* blends the deadpan but beautiful vibes of newsreels, NASA static drone cameras – and actual musical sequences with a drill team – to a great new film that's almost educational. The feature started out as a sequel to one of Finn's short films about a gerbil, hoping to send the little guy in space. The film kept growing until humans in spacesuits and dance numbers were added. It would win art direction awards if film fests had them. The music is original but drawn

from 70s German pop and real communist morale boosting riffs. There's even exit music. The scenes and dialogue are also new but inspired by real training films.

While its perfect for film fest crowds and art fans who's temple is the Museum of Jurassic Technology's oil painting lounge dedicated to the Russian rocket dogs who did not return from space, *Interkosmos* could also play on PBS. And I seriously, seriously want it to play to Russian audiences over 50 – can anyone make this happen? (*Mike Plante*)

6.2 SELECTED REVIEWS

6.2.1 VILLAGE VOICE (New York, January 2008)

Though critically lauded and popular at festivals, Finn's previous work—like his East German cosmonaut mock-doc *Interkosmos*—could have been taken (unfairly) as mere winking countercultural nostalgia, but *Trinchera* proves that he's engaged in some serious play. A crypto-retro-Marxist faux-documentation of one day in a Peruvian women's prison populated by Shining Path Maoists, *Trinchera* has the flattened feel and relentless tempo of a long-lost artifact of low-tech propaganda; shot entirely in Spanish and Navajo, complete with large-scale rallies and musical numbers, its compulsive ambition only furthers its enigmas. (*Ed Halter*)

6.2.2 VARIETY (October 2007)

Following "*Interkosmos*," his improbably original pic about an imaginary Soviet space program, American indie filmmaker Jim Finn continues to confound with "*The Shining Trench of President Gonzalo*," an unclassifiable work that creates a slightly fictional world, occupied by female prisoners loyal to the titular Peruvian guerrilla leader. What purports to be a doc on these Maoist true believers is actually a cleverly conceived facsimile, as well as a devilish spoof of political fanaticism. Leading-edge fests and hip venues and cinematheques are likeliest takers, with mainstream buyers sure to be clueless.

Though clearly based on Peru's Shining Path guerrilla movement, which was active in the countryside throughout the '80s and into the '90s, Finn's pic replaces the term "path" with "trench," suggesting an even more militant, kickass class of rebels. Finn's

camera supposedly visits Canto Grande prison in 1989 Peru to record the day-to-day activities, statements, meetings and manifestos of the Shining Trench women, and finds them to be thoroughly swept up in a fever for armed struggle, even though they have no hope of prison release. Viewers arriving late will wonder what they've stumbled into, for Finn's simulation of an actual Maoist cadre is utterly convincing. The group hashes out methods of battle and medical care in the line of fire, ideological points of debate and theories of working-class dictatorship, and unabashedly embraces a particularly vicious version of Mao's Cultural Revolution-era "scorched earth" policies, in which any vestige of bourgeois life is to be eradicated. The massive chunks of discussion are taken directly from actual texts by Mao and Shining Path prisoners, delivered by Finn's ensemble with an off-the-cuff immediacy that's downright startling.

Displacing the mood of permanent war are more relaxed episodes, in which the women knit, paint, make music and even perform "Macbeth" in, of all languages, the Dine tongue of the Navajo tribe. Long before the end of this too-brief featurette (just long enough to stand on its own, but also short enough to be comfortably billed with "Interkosmos"), dazzled auds will get a strong, heady whiff of what life ruled by Maoist fanatics would feel and sound like, and the bloody-minded absurdity underlying it all.

Perfs are astonishing in retrospect, and the physical creation of a prison space in New Mexico is pure filmmaking legerdemain. Pic's onscreen title is in Spanish. (*Robert Koehler*)

6.3 SEPTIMO VICIO INTERVIEW (Spain, September 2007)

INTERVIEWER:

How do you like to introduce yourself? As a filmmaker or as an artist?

JIM FINN:

Depends on the audience. I think of myself as a filmmaker but an artist is allowed much more leeway. If you're a filmmaker, are you a genre/dramatic/experimental director? Whereas people understand that artists want to make a unique piece of art.

INTERVIEWER:

In short films such as “Comunista!”, “El Güero” and “Wüstenspringmaus” there appear some of the visual keys and topics of your future films: retro esthetic, the use of file footage and propaganda, the recreation of the spirit of the classic Hollywood and its musicals, karaokes, or the portrait of both, revolutionary and strange episodes of the animal life. What can you tell us about all of these aspects?

JIM FINN:

I see my work as starting with these films. I was completely committed to working in the short form and never thought of them as stepping stones to feature filmmaking. Now that I am working in a longer form, I have to use everything I can to make it work. Naturally I'm going to work in the same style and themes and use similar devices. The use of propaganda I'm interested in because I love the idea of communist propaganda films even though when you actually watch them, they are usually mind-numbingly boring. I thought of myself as a consultant that went back in time to make the propaganda more appealing and fit in more with our postmodern aesthetics. The 70's doc was the American version of communist propaganda. There were lots of long nature shots and doomy music and talk of how the last of the golden eagles was dying and stuff like that. It was more or less true and it served its purpose, to push along these laws that we need to protect species and habitats but it tended towards the hyperbolic and gloomy so I am just making them more revolutionary. The Hollywood musicals in the Golden Age were amazing but sadly lacked almost any political realities with the exception of the early Warner Bros musicals, so I just wanted to radicalize the genre. In a sense, what would Hollywood have been like had Eugene Debs been our first socialist president.

INTERVIEWER:

Which are, in your opinion, your influences at the time of filming your short movies and [feature-length] movies?

JIM FINN:

Star Trek, Hollywood musicals, 70's docs, Dune, Luis Buñuel's low-budget Mexican films, my gerbil Francoise and my ball python Martin.

INTERVIEWER:

In your short film “wüstenspringmaus”, we see the “correlation between the life of a gerbil and the capitalism of the New World in its incessant energy”. It seems that, in

fact, in your films to keep the interest in connecting episodes of the animal world with relevant history events in the history of economics and politics during the 20th Century. Why do you have this interest?



FIGURE 6.1 *wüstenspringmaus* still

JIM FINN:

It was a gerbil actually. I had this idea for a trilogy with the gerbil as the cute but destructive capitalism, the social and gentle guinea pig representing communism and the rabbit representing fascism. I never really made the fascist movie, but the gerbil one is *wüstenspringmaus* and the guinea pig part ended up in *Interkosmos*. During the Cold War, when I was growing up, everything was used for the benefit of our respective economic systems: space travel, sports, etc... so why not animals. Some animals just seem more capitalistic or socialistic. Of course, this is also an excuse to talk about capitalism, which is basically unheard of in the US. Talking about capitalism is like talking about the amount of nitrogen vs. oxygen in the air. It's just the natural way of things. We can talk about the excesses or imbalances of our system or we can talk about

political and economic realities, but there is no meaningful discussion outside of academia about whether or not capitalism is really the smartest way for us to go. Is it really working for the majority of humans? I think that's an important question.

INTERVIEWER:

What can we find in the series of videos "La lotería"?

JIM FINN:

It's in a bit of a limbo right now. I'm trying to figure out the best way to distribute it. A couple are on Youtube.

INTERVIEWER:

We had the opportunity to see "Interkosmos" in Sitges 2006 and we chose it as one of the best films in the festival, valuing positively the visual creativity and its humor. Since its premiere in Rotterdam, which is the attitude of the public and critic towards the film?

JIM FINN:

Interkosmos is the gift that keeps on giving. I had been used to a slow burn with my films. It took *wüstenspringmaus* nearly a year to get going and same with *Decision 80* and *el güero/comunista!* But it great some great reviews from critics at Rotterdam which really helped. It's an odd sort of experimental film so it needed all the help it could get. It's still screening around. The American audiences that are used to strange cinema and are open-minded usually love the film; those that are prepared for a wacky mockumentary comedy are disappointed because the humor sometimes spills into a pseudo-scientific monograph or a political diatribe, which I love but kind of dampens the humor. I was at the screenings in Rotterdam and in Leipzig, Germany. Even though there's a lot of German, the film basically plays best to an English-speaking audience because everything is subtitled or in English voiceover and some of the German is garbled. So in Germany, people didn't laugh at the parts like the Trolley Song which normally gets laughs but they do laugh at the idea that Albany, NY is Germany and that the name of the program is "wundertüte". Overall it seems pretty universal, especially if there are subtitles in the home language.

INTERVIEWER:

How did you come up with the idea of making this film?

JIM FINN:

I had this idea of a communist space colonization mission involving guinea pigs and miniatures. It was going to be a sequel to *wüstenspringmaus* about the capitalist gerbil. Then I realized I needed humans and a space capsule and footage of outer space and then it developed from there including lots of references to (socialistic) dolphins. I had been talking about it for over a year and trying to figure out a way to get the funds and crew and cast together. Once we started production, everything happened fast.

INTERVIEWER:

Both the nostalgia of the 70's and some affection towards human utopías are, in my opinion, present in "Interkosmos". What do you think about this?



FIGURE 6.2 *Decision 80* still

JIM FINN:

Well, certainly the 70's was one of the most open-minded time politically in the US. Post hippy, post Watergate. Jimmy Carter was president. It's amazing that guy was ever president of the United States especially if you look at the animals that came after him. Here's a guy who really tried to run US policy (not always successfully) in accordance with Christian and traditional American values like tolerance and equality for all. And he was just destroyed for years. I doubt if Bill Clinton mentioned him 5 times in his presidency. Now he's basically a non-person as a president. He's considered a model ex-President of course but that really goes along with the narrative that he should never have been President. And that time with the Soviet Union was an interesting time as well: the detente years. How might things have developed if they Soviet states had been allowed to transition out of that system instead of being plunged into capitalism like a drowning puppy?

INTERVIEWER:

As it happens in many of your short films, the music is wonderful. Is this one aspect that worries you much at the time of making your films? What can you tell us about the work of Colleen Burke and Jim Becker?

JIM FINN:

They are both amazing musicians and were willing to work together. They got along and liked each other's work. I gave them a number of examples of music I loved for the movie and they came up with their own version that really added so much to the movie. They gave me a copy of the opening jam of the movie and I was completely blown away. That's one of those moments where collaborators take some of your ideas and add their experience and their vision and energy. It was amazing.

INTERVIEWER:

Your new film is called "La trinchera luminosa del Presidente Gonzalo", a film which has been seen in the Chicago Underground Film Festival and which shows us one day in the life of the women of the Sendero Luminoso terrorista group in the Canto Grande Jail in Peru. What can you tell us about this film?

JIM FINN:

I wanted to make a film that would show a stylized version of a day in the life of Shining Path prisoners. This group, which was the most extreme left-wing guerrilla

group in Latin America, had a high proportion of women commanders and guerrillas, all of whom were fanatically dedicated to Presidente Gonzalo. I wondered what happened to a lot of them after he was captured. The group has been more or less forgotten here in the states, but I've never stopped thinking about them. So I found a location, the 4H Youth Dormitory at the New Mexico State Fairgrounds, and casted women of Mexican and Navajo Indian descent. We painted the sets, got everyone in costume, recorded the music before the movie, practiced the marches and the lines, then put everyone in this prison for a week and out came the movie. I had a rough edit in a few weeks but it took months to make it watchable. The first edit was just wall-to-wall Maoist rants and non-stop subtitles. It's much more reasonable now. There's a lot of humor in the film but it's different than *Interkosmos*, which lent itself to a lighter tone at times. This humor in this one is in some of the metaphors and situations the women are in. Overall, I wanted a really different kind of movie than *Interkosmos*.

INTERVIEWER:

Which are your future projects?

JIM FINN:

Right now I am shooting and editing a film about a South Korean video artist that goes to a North Korean art residency. I've mostly been working on her videos, what she's been doing there. Now I have to make it work as a longer format film. It's a fun project and hard since I'm back working in a language I don't understand. After that I'm not sure.

7. CONCLUSION

My goal with *Trinchera Luminosa* was to make a film that could be viewed as a document of what an intense revolutionary indoctrination looks like. With *Interkosmos*, I wanted to make a film about an alternative future from the past: a utopian community in space freed from the historical Stalinist baggage of capitalist interference. In *The Juche Idea* I worked from the idea of a leftist artist trying to escape the capitalist cultural-political model that she is trapped in. With all three films, I wanted implant this idea of what happens to these people. Are they dead in space, trapped in North Korea, or still in prison? A revolution is an ongoing process and adapts to circumstances, but our idea of revolutionaries is inevitably someone dead in the past, young and idealistic, or old and corrupt. How are these artistic revolutionary characters functioning within a post- or soon-to-be post-communist system. Have they renounced their beliefs or faded away? Or are they still working but in another way.

As an artist making films myself, the first thing is to challenge the dominant structure and classification of films into genres and conventions. If you agree to rules laid out at the beginning, then you are starting at a severe disadvantage. Working from a revolutionary film model, it's impossible to go back to the optimism and sense of historical certainty that a film like *Battle of Algiers* has. But freed up from the burden of prodding on or glorifying a revolution, I am able to create characters functioning against the tide of history but with a revolutionary certainty that never lets up. The characters are back to the Bilbo Baggins of the *Fellowship of the Ring*: the young hobbit embarking on a likely doomed journey but plodding along anyway with his comrades.

APPENDIX

COMMUNIST HEROES OF SOUTH AMERICA PILLOWS

These six needlepoint portraits are all of people who were once and often still are considered communist heroes. Each portrait appears alongside a symbol of a group they belonged to, were sponsored by, or influenced. Besides representing different countries, each of them also represents a different aspect of communism. Carlos Marighella represents the urban foco, or the idea that the revolution should start in a major city and work its way out; Tania, who fought in the Bolivian countryside with Ché, represents the rural foco, the Cuban model that the revolution will begin in the countryside; Markus Wolf represents the institutional communism of the Eastern Bloc; Edith Lagos represents the Maoist insurgency; Carlos the Jackal represents the international terrorism of the left; and finally, Father Camilo Torres represents liberation theology, which is the moral imperative that the struggle for justice happen in this world before getting to the next.

I chose needlepoint because I grew up with it. In St Louis, girls make their boy-friends and brothers needlepoint belts and women needlepoint pillows and church cushions among other things. I designed the images I wanted and sent them to the Sign of the Arrow, a needlepoint store in an affluent suburb of St. Louis. They hand-paint the image on the canvas and I stitch across it and then make them into pillows. A number of people have helped on this project. I want to acknowledge the hard work of many friends who helped stitch, stuff, sew, iron, and advise.



Figure Appendix: Pillows top left to right—Markus Wolf, Carlos the Jackal, Tania la guerrilla; bottom left to right—Edith Lagos, Camilo Torres, Carlos Marighella

Carlos Marighella

Brazilian revolutionary (1911-1969) famous for writing the *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla*. He was born in Bahia in eastern Brazil and joined the Brazilian Communist Party in 1930. In 1953 he traveled to China and met Mao Tse-tung. After being expelled from the party in 1967 for his “pro-Cuban” sympathies, he formed the National Liberation Action (ALN). His tactics and writings inspired the Italian Red Brigades, the Provisional Irish Republican Army, and the Red Army Faction (Baader-Meinhof Gang). It is their logo that appears on the pillow. He was killed in a police ambush in November 1969.

A second strategic objective of revolutionary terrorism is to provoke ruling elites into a disastrous overreaction, thereby creating widespread resentment against them. This is a classic strategy, and when it works, the impact can be devastating. As explained by Carlos Marighella, the Brazilian guerrilla leader whose writings influenced political terrorists in the 1960s and 1970s, if a government can be provoked into a purely military response to terrorism, its overreaction will alienate the masses, causing them to “revolt against the army and the police and blame them for this state of things.” (Johnson, preface)

Markus Wolf

An East German born in 1923 and a “fluent Spanish speaker who ran Stasi operations in Chile during the Allende government, set up a system using false compartments in cars to smuggle fugitives like [Chilean Socialist Party leader Carlos] Altamirano across the border into Argentina.” (Dinges) The sword and the shield were the symbol of the East German intelligence agency, the Ministry for State Security, Stasi for short. Known as the man without a face for his ability to avoid being photographed, Wolf went on to be the head of the entire Stasi and had a reputation as brutally efficient in his intelligence work. He was put on trial and later acquitted by the post-communist unified German government.

It used to be my principle, even with someone who sold himself to us, to try to remove their feeling that they were doing something dirty. I tried to instill a different motivation, to give them the security and the conviction that they were doing something good, something necessary, something useful—if you want to use a grandiose expression, that they were doing something for peace. I mean, we did believe we were doing it for peace. (Wolf)

Edith Lagos

On September 3, 1982, nineteen-year-old Edith Lagos was killed in a confrontation with members of Peru’s Guardia Republicana. A few days later more than thirty thousand people attended her funeral in Ayacucho in an act of open defiance to the authorities’ ban of a public funeral. The frail-looking, petite Lagos had become a tragic and romantic rallying figure in a context where there were none. A member of the Partido Comunista del Perú-Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) since the age of sixteen, Lagos symbolized the aspirations of many of the Sierra youth who were, then, still trying to understand the full significance of the bloody rebellion initiated only two years earlier in the remote Sierra village of Chuschi. More significant still, the apotheotic posthumous tribute paid to Lagos was a clear recognition of the important role played by women in Sendero’s organization. (Castro)

Tania la guerrilla

“The only woman who fought with the guerrilla force led by Ché Guevara in Bolivia, Tania’s portrait hangs in every Women’s Federation office in Cuba.” (from the foreward to Tania, Marta Rojas, 1973) She was born Haydee Tamara Bunke Bider in

Argentina to German exiles in 1937. She moved to Cuba in 1961 and was trained in third world liberation struggles. She was assigned to build a support network for the newly forming Bolivian guerrilla front. With the assistance of CIA advisors the Bolivian army tracked down the guerrillas. Tania was killed in an ambush just six weeks before Che's death in 1967. Her bones were discovered in 1998 and reinterred near Che's in Santa Clara, Cuba.

When Tania's diary was later examined it was found to contain only one entry, a quotation from Niccolai Ostrovski's *How the Steel was Tempered*: "The most precious thing a man possesses is life. It is given to him only once and he must make use of it in such a way that the years he has lived do not weigh on him and he is not shamed by a mean and miserable past, so that when he dies he can say, I have devoted my whole life and strength to the most beautiful thing in the world, the struggle for the liberation of mankind." (Rojas, Epilogue)

Carlos the Jackal

Born Ilich Ramírez Sánchez in 1949 in Caracas, Venezuela, he was named by his Marxist father after Lenin's middle name. He joined the Venezuela Communist Youth in 1964 and studied at Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow. Carlos befriended Palestinian students and after he was expelled from the university for joining Arab student protests, he went to Jordan to train in the camps for the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. He gained a reputation as a fearless fighter during the "Black September" expulsion of the Palestinian guerrillas. He adopted his guerrilla name Carlos while a member of the Popular Front and became famous as an international terrorist after kidnapping the OPEC representatives in Vienna. He was later expelled from the Popular Front and began work as a terrorist subcontractor based in Eastern Europe and the Mideast. He was captured in the Sudan in 1997 and is currently imprisoned in France

Father Camilo Torres

Fidel Castro remarked that 'the Communists in Latin America have become the theologians and the theologians Communists.' His aphorism has enough truth in it to trouble the ruling classes and confound the State Department and the CIA. With the Roman Catholic Church in Latin America, heretofore a rampart of the existing order, there has appeared a new movement—priests preaching the gospel of socialist revolution in the language of Christianity. No one is more exemplary of that movement than Camilo Torres, the Colombian priest who was killed in the moun-

tains of Bucaranga by government troops, on February 15, 1966, four months after joining the guerrillas of the Army of National Liberation.

Camilo was a rare man: priest, professor, agitator and organizer, and for an all too brief moment in his life, guerrilla fighter. At his death, his personal influence among the masses had become so extraordinary that for fear that his grave might become a revolutionary shrine for the dispossessed, the government has never disclosed its location. (Torres, preface)

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